

Wildflower Meadows

Today wildflower meadows are extremely rare – we have lost 95% in the last 50 years. Although they can never be exactly recreated, with patience a colourful meadow can be created from scratch. Such habitats are teeming with wildlife: spiders spinning webs; caterpillars munching leaves; butterflies and bees sipping nectar. Such meadows are usually created by a particular pattern of mowing or grazing.

Converting an Existing Grassy Area Into a Meadow

- If you want to turn an existing grassy area into a wildflower meadow, you need to know what is already growing. Let it grow over the summer to see what turns up. You will often find that only a few flowers appear, such as buttercups or daisies, so you may need to introduce some yourself. This can be done by 'over-seeding' but is best done by planting wildflowers.
- Over-seeding – Remove squares of turf and top soil (30cm x 30cm) and seed one or two types of wildflowers in the autumn.
- Planting – Wildflowers can be planted as pot-grown plants. Plant them in groups in the turf in autumn. To reduce competition from other plants, mulch round your plantings.

Creating a Wildflower Meadow From Bare Soil

- To have a true wildflower meadow, you will need poor soil. Most soils are too rich in nutrients and will just cause vigorous growth of a few dominant species. To reduce the fertility of the soil, strip the top 5-10cm of top soil. Then rake and roll the soil to produce a seedbed.
- The best time to sow your wildflower seeds is early autumn; many seeds need the cold winter months to germinate.
- Native wildflower mixes (most mixes consist of 80% fine grasses such as bents and fescues and 20% mixed wildflowers) can be purchased from suppliers.
- Pick a mix suitable to your soil type and local to your area.
- To get an even spread of seed, mix it with sand or sawdust.
- Immediately after sowing, rake the surface lightly and firm with a small roller.
- Never fertilise your wildflower meadow.

Wildflower Meadow Maintenance

- Ancient wildflower meadows have been cut or grazed in the same way for centuries. A school meadow is unlikely to be grazed, so you will need to consider a mowing regime.
- The best regime for a school is probably a spring meadow. This type of meadow is harvested in July, and mown normally for the rest of the year. It will be at its peak during the summer term. This sort of meadow will encourage bulbs and other early flowering wildflowers. It may be an idea to maintain a cut pathway through the meadow so the pupils have access to it.
- Choose a dry spell for cutting the hay, after the flowers have seeded.
- Cutting a whole meadow in one go can take away food needed by insects, so it is a good idea to leave some areas uncut for them. The best way to do this is to cut the edges of your grassland on rotation, leaving a different side uncut each year.
- The meadow can be cut by strimmer, scythe or even shears if your meadow is small.
- Walking on a mown spring meadow will help seed dispersal.
- The hay should be left for a few n tossed to shake out the ripe seeds.
- Rake up the hay and remove. If you have no other use for your hay, you can compost it.



EARLY FLOWERING		LATE FLOWERING	
	FLOWER COLOUR		FLOWER COLOUR
WET SOILS			
Fritillary	White/Mauve	Greate bird's-foot-trefoil	Yellow
Marsh Marigold	Yellow	Devil's-bit scabious	Blue-purple
Lady's smock	Pink/White	Perforate St John's wort	Yellow
Ragged robin	Pink		
HEAVY CLAY SOILS			
Rough hawkbit	Yellow	Meadow cranesbill	Blue
Common sorrel	Green/red	Common knapweed	Red-pink
Greater knapweed	Red-pink		
Spiny restharrow	Pink		
MOST SOILS			
Common bird's-foot-trefoil	Yellow	Lady's bedstraw	Yellow
Bugle	Blue	Common bird's-foot-trefoil	Yellow
Salad burnet	Red/yellow	Meadow buttercup	Yellow
Meadow buttercup	Yellow	Wild carrot	White
White campion	White	Oxeye daisy	White
Red clover	Pink	Goat's beard	Yellow
Cowslip	Yellow	Black medick	Yellow
Oxeye Daisy	White	Yellow rattle	Yellow
Black medick	Yellow	Field scabious	Blue-lilac
Yellow rattle	Yellow	Selfheal	Violet
Kidney vetch	Various	Kidney vetch	Various
Tufted vetch	Blue-violet		
Meadow vetchling	Yellow		
Yarrow	White		
LIGHT SANDY SOILS			
Field forget-me-not	Blue	Harebell	Blue
Less trefoil	Yellow	Perforate St John's wort	Yellow

The First Year of Your Meadow

- When the seeds have germinated and the plants have grown to about 10cm tall, the meadow should be cut. Any thistles and docks should be pulled up.
- Over the first year, try and cut your meadow every 6-8 weeks. Always remove the cuttings to prevent dead plant material adding nutrients to the soil.

Fact

- A stag beetle grub may spend up to 5 years living and eating in dead wood, before pupating and emerging as the well-defended beetle!
- Song thrushes use larger stones as anvils to crack open snail shells.