

Introduction

Nearly every garden has at least one area of lawn. Lawns are areas for children to play on, for walking and running on, for sitting or sunbathing on and for picnics and outdoor dining. Though they are probably the garden areas we use the most they can also be important areas for a surprisingly wide range of wildlife.



White clover

By thinking wild and not aspiring to a totally flat, bright green, uniform area of closely mown short grass we can celebrate our daisies and clovers, enjoy the hum of contented bees and have just as robust and practical a lawn for both us and wildlife to use.

Did you know...?

- Worms in lawns are brilliant at tunnelling; their burrows help aerate your lawn, create good drainage and their casts provide free fertilizer for your lawn.



Song thrush

- Lawns can help prevent flooding! Rainwater is absorbed naturally by your lawn whereas hard landscaping such as paving means that run-off flows into drains and can add to flooding, especially in urban areas.

This leaflet will...

Describe the range of wildlife that can benefit from a wildlife friendly lawn.

Give you top tips on managing your lawn in an environmentally and wildlife friendly way.

The long and short of wildlife friendly lawns...

Birds and lawns

Lawns provide feeding areas for birds including blackbirds, song thrushes, starlings, pied wagtails and wood pigeons. If your lawn harbours ant colonies then green woodpeckers may be attracted.



Green woodpecker

Mammals and lawns

Badgers and foxes will dig holes in lawns in search of food. Along with moles they can be a problem but for many people the pleasure of sharing their gardens with such amazing creatures is worth the damage. Allowing your lawn to grow longer next to hedges and shrub borders will encourage mice, voles and shrews to visit.

Invertebrates and lawns

Leatherjackets (the larvae of daddy-long-legs) and cockchafer larvae attract birds like starlings. Healthy populations of earthworms will bring blackbirds and hedgehogs to feed on your lawn while the flowers of red and white clover in your lawn will attract bees.

Wildflowers and lawns

Rosette forming species in lawns such as daisy, dandelion, ribwort plantain and greater plantain will tolerate frequent mowing. Creeping species such as selfheal, black medick, white and red clovers may also be present. Plants such as clovers fix nitrogen and provide natural fertilizer for your lawn. Why not plant cowslips, primroses and crocchi in an area of your lawn? Avoid cutting these areas until well after the plants have finished flowering.

Fungi and lawns

Old lawns, where fertilizers and pesticides have not been used, can be incredibly rich habitats for fungi. If your lawn supports populations of waxcups and earthtongues then you have a very valuable fungi habitat.



Earthtongue fungi

Top tips for a wildlife friendly lawn

- During summer droughts don't cut the grass too frequently - slightly longer grass is more drought resistant. If you have to water then do this after sunset, using stored rain water if possible. Remember a brown lawn is not a dead lawn and will quickly go green again following rainfall.



Creeping buttercup

- Avoid using artificial lawn fertilizer and harmful chemicals - a wildlife friendly lawn needs to support lots of invertebrates and chemical free lawns can also be rich in fungi, mosses, and wildflowers which bring their own beauty to your lawn as well as attracting other wildlife.



Common field grasshopper

- Set aside part of your lawn as a longer grass area - long grass is one of the rarest habitats in gardens and even small areas will benefit invertebrates such as grasshoppers, spiders and beetles. As an experiment why not peg out a one metre square of lawn and let the grass grow and flower - it can be fascinating to see the range of insect life that will live in your pocket handkerchief meadow.
- Develop an earthworm friendly lawn and other wildlife will visit. To encourage earthworms to thrive don't use chemical lawn treatments and don't clear every leaf off your lawn in autumn. Earthworms will feed on leaves by pulling them into their burrows at night.

Frequently asked questions

Will wildflowers survive when I mow the lawn?

Plants which grow as ground hugging rosettes such as plantains and daisies can survive frequent cutting. Cutting less frequently, especially in dry summer weather, will enable a bigger range of wildflowers to thrive in your lawn. If you have a large lawn consider creating a meadow area for wildflowers which is only infrequently mown.

What should I do with my grass cuttings?

Grass cuttings can be spread thinly as a mulch on surrounding beds and will help retain soil moisture and increase earthworm populations. You can also compost grass cuttings, but as they have a high water content it is important they are mixed with dryer 'brown' material to produce good compost. Grass which has been treated with moss killers or pesticides should not be composted – another good reason to avoid their use.



Ribwort plantain

To find out more about Norfolk's wildlife visit www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/naturalconnections

Alternatively call Norfolk's free wildlife information service on **01603 598333**

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