

Village greens and meadows

Creating a wildflower meadow

If your village green space (village green/playing field) is a monotonous expanse of short green grass and the village fancy something a little more attractive and beneficial to wildlife, consider creating a traditional wildflower meadow. Not only are wildflowers pretty to look at, they are extremely important for our native wildlife, providing hunting and feeding grounds for many insects, mammals and birds.

What grows there already?

Survey the area to see what already grows as this will help you to make decisions on what other species to plant and how to manage it.

Wildflower meadows do best on soils with poor fertility, as on rich soils the coarser grasses grow faster and can swamp out the slower-growing wildflowers. It is a good idea to test your soil first as different plants may be suited to different soil types (some examples are listed over the page). Traditionally meadows were used for grazing stock, or were cut for hay each year. Management techniques for garden meadows should mimic these events.

Converting an existing lawn

Although it is possible to turn an existing lawn into a meadow, if the soil underneath is very fertile the results may not be fully satisfactory. The first step is to reduce the existing fertility, by mowing closely for several seasons and removing all the cuttings. Unless you have been using lawn weedkillers there may already be some wild plants in your lawn. Try leaving a patch unmown for a few weeks and see what comes up. You might find daisy, meadow buttercup, dandelion, cat's ear, black medick, speedwell, plantain or clover. Additional wildflowers can be introduced to the meadow in two ways: overseeding and planting pot grown wildflowers.

Over-seeding

Cut the grass as low as possible, then rake away the debris. This should leave bare patches of soil. Sow your seeds over the bare patches, then rake lightly or sprinkle some dry soil over them. Water lightly. While the wildflowers are establishing themselves mow with the blades on the highest setting, this will prevent the grass swamping out your flowers.

Planting pot grown wildflowers

Grow wildflowers from seed or buy pot grown plants. These can then be planted directly into the lawn. Clearing a small area around the plant will reduce competition while it is establishing itself. If planting is done in September the plants can establish themselves over winter to flower next year. This method works well in a small meadow, and has a much higher chance of success than using seed.

Establishing a meadow from scratch

Preparation of your site is important: it needs to have low soil fertility and to be free from perennial weeds. To reduce fertility, strip off the turf or a layer of topsoil from your chosen site. This will also remove some weed seeds. Dig out the roots of perennial weeds such as docks and nettles, then roll the ground to firm it. If time allows, leave for a few weeks to allow weed seeds to germinate, these can then be hoed off.

The best time to sow seed is March - April or August - September. You can buy flower and grass seed mixes to suit a variety of soil types. Try to avoid very vigorous grasses such as rye-grass, as these will quickly out compete the slower growing wild flowers. Fine grasses such as bents and fescues are more suitable. Where possible, stick to wild flower species found in your area. Seeds should always be from local sources, avoid imported wildflower seeds as these may be genetically different from the native flowers, and are unlikely to thrive in our climate.

Some seeds are very fine, so it can be helpful to mix the seed with damp sand to help spread it more evenly. In dry weather water the seeds in with a fine spray.

Once the seeds have germinated mow every 6-8 weeks with the mower blades on the highest setting; this promotes root growth and prevents the grasses becoming dominant over the wildflowers. In the second year establish a mowing regime appropriate to the flowering time of the meadow.

Mowing regimes

Meadows are usually managed in one of two ways, depending on when most of the plants flower. Spring flowering meadows are not mowed until after midsummer, then kept short into the autumn. Summer flowering meadows are mowed in the spring up until about June, then left to flower until late autumn.

In both cases mowing is resumed once most of the seed is ripe. Leaving the hay on the ground for a few days helps shed the seed back into the meadow (alternatively, the hay can be used as a seed source for a new meadow elsewhere). After this the hay should be removed, to help lower soil fertility.

Other ways to use wild flowers

In a small garden or on very fertile soil a wildflower meadow may not be practical. But there are other ways to bring wildflowers into your garden or green-space.

Enrich part of a lawn with spring flowering bulbs. Plant wild daffodils, snowdrops and bluebells, or even fritillary and spring squill. Bulbs should be planted at a depth 3 or 4 times their height. Random drifts will look most effective. In spring do not mow until most of the foliage has died back, about two months after flowering, as the leaves are needed to nourish the bulbs for next year. After this mow as normal. Early flowering wildflowers such as primroses are worth trying alongside the bulbs, plant out potgrown plants into the lawn in autumn.

If you need to integrate wildlife with the existing uses of the space eg a playing field, consider establishing areas of wildflower meadow around the margins.

Wildflowers to grow in a meadow

Common Name	Scientific Name	Flowering Period	Soil Type	Flower Colour
Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	June-Sept	Prefers chalk	Yellow
Autumn hawkbit	<i>Leontodon autumnalis</i>	June-Oct	All	Yellow
Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	June-Sept	All but acid	Yellow
Black medick	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	April-Aug	Fertile	Yellow
Bugle	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	April-June	Damp	Blue
Common cat's-ear	<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	June-Sept	All	Yellow
Common restharrow	<i>Ononis repens</i>	June-Sept	Chalk	Pink
Common toadflax	<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	July-Oct	All	Yellow/orange
Common vetch	<i>Vicia sativa</i>	May-Sept	All	Pink/purple
Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>	March-May	Basic	Yellow
Cuckoo flower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	April-June	Damp	Pink/white
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	March-Oct	All	White
Field scabious	<i>Knautia arvensis</i>	July-Sept	Dry	Pink
Goat's-beard	<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>	May-July	All	Yellow
Greater knapweed	<i>Centaurea scabiosa</i>	June-Aug	Chalk	Purple
Harebell	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	July/Sept	Chalk	Blue/purple
Hoary plantain	<i>Plantago media</i>	May-Aug	Most	White
Kidney vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>	July-Sept	Dry	Yellow
Lady's bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>	July-Aug	All	Yellow
Lesser stitchwort	<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	May-Aug	Acid	White
Marsh marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	March-May	Wet	Yellow
Meadow buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	May-Aug	All	Yellow
Meadow cranes-bill	<i>Geranium pratense</i>	July-Sept	Most	Blue/purple
Meadow saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga granulata</i>	April-June	Dry not acid	White
Meadow vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	May-Aug	All	Yellow
Mouse-ear hawkweed	<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>	May-Aug	Dry	Yellow
Oxeye daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	May-Sept	Fertile	White
Perforate St-John's wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	July-Sept	Chalk	Yellow
Ragged robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>	May-Aug	Damp	Pink
Red clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	May-Sept	All	Red/white
Ribwort plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	April-Oct	All	White
Salad burnet	<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	May-Aug	Chalk	Pink/green
Self heal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	July-Sept	All	Pink/purple
Snakes-head fritillary	<i>Fritillaria meleagris</i>	April-May	Damp	Deep red
Snowdrop	<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	Jan-March	Damp	White
White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	July-Sept	All	White
Wild basil	<i>Clinopodium vulgare</i>	July-Sept	Chalk	Red
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	July-Aug	All	White
Yellow rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	May-Aug	All	Yellow

Never dig up wildflowers from the wild. Taking seeds can also be illegal, especially if it is a rare plant—always get the landowner's permission first.

Find out more...

Flora Locale promote good practice in the use and sourcing of British wildflowers. Aimed at landscaping projects, it's a very interesting website. www.floralocale.org

Naturescape is a wildflower nursery just over the Nottinghamshire border and has a useful website and demonstration gardens. www.naturescape.co.uk
Maple Farm, Coach Gap Lane, Langar, Notts 01949 860592

Wildflower seeds are also available from **Growing Wild**, The Dutch Barn, Sibsey Road, Boston PE21 9QR tel: 01205 359935 or email: growingwild@postmaster.co.uk and Emorsgate Seeds 01553 829028 <http://wildseed.co.uk>

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

Banovallum House
Manor House Street
Horncastle
Lincolnshire LN9 5HF
Tel: 01507 526667
Email: info@lincstrust.co.uk

www.lincstrust.org.uk

Registered charity no. 218895

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

