



**Hampshire &
Isle of Wight**
Wildlife Trust

MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE:

Wildflower Meadows

Wildflower meadows are important

Meadows provide homes for a huge diversity of wildflowers as well as butterflies, bees, grasshoppers and many other creatures. In the last 100 years over 95% of our wildflower meadows have disappeared. But, you can help. You can develop a colourful wildflower meadow in your own garden. It does not have to occupy the whole garden but could be as little as a narrow strip fringing the main lawn. If you don't have a garden but have space for a window box or plant pots, you can still plant wildflowers.



hiwwt.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 201081
Devils bit scabious © Amy Lewis



Before you start, stop mowing

If you want to turn a piece or all of your lawn into a meadow, the simplest way is to give the mower a rest and let your lawn grow during the summer and see what turns up. A good flower identification book will be useful – this can be borrowed from your local library. You may find that you already have a number of wildflowers and therefore just need to pull out the more aggressive perennials. However, it may be that only buttercups and daisies appear, so you may want to introduce some plants yourself. This can be done in several ways from “over seeding” to simply planting wildflowers directly into the lawn.



Team Wilder member, Jan Stroud, stopped mowing her garden on the Isle of Wight and found it very rewarding. Read her experience here: hiwwt.org.uk/blog/guest-blogger/my-mini-meadow.

Sourcing wildflowers

It's really important to buy your seed or plug plants from a reputable supplier. We would always suggest only using native seed and plants of local provenance, and avoiding packets of seed of unknown origin. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have used in the past:

- Charles Flower: charlesflower-wildflowers.co.uk
- Emorsgate: wildseed.co.uk
- Wildflower Turf Ltd: wildflowerturf.co.uk

Another option may be to get in touch with your local nature group, such as 'Natural Basingstoke' (naturalbasingstoke.org.uk). These groups often collect seed from local areas and sell it to local people.

Choosing wildflowers

You've decided you want to be a bit more proactive about making a wildflower meadow in your garden. That's great!

A very good plant to use is yellow rattle. This species is semi-parasitic, gaining nutrients partially through the roots of grasses. Consequently, yellow rattle will suppress the growth of grass therefore reducing competition for other wildflowers.

Knowing your soil type will give you a good idea of what plants will thrive in your garden. Find out your soil type here: gardenersworld.com/plants/find-out-your-soil-type

How to plant wildflower meadows

There are four main ways you can create a wildflower meadow: seeding in small patches, plug planting, over-seeding, and starting from scratch.

Method 1: Seeding in small patches

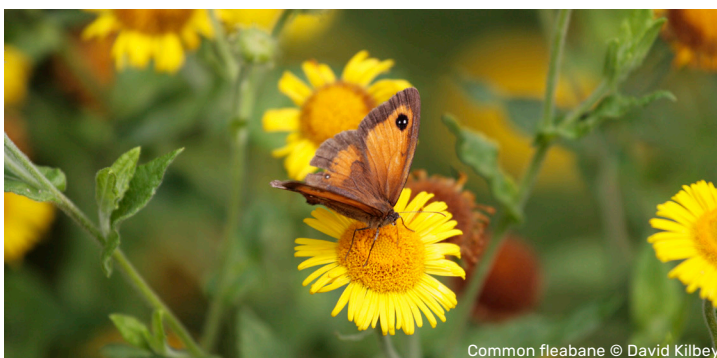
For this method, you will need to remove squares of turf and topsoil and put them on your compost heap. Then sow wildflower seed into the bare earth. Some seeds will need cold weather to germinate, hence autumn would be best for sowing, but some may be fine to sow in spring, so it is best to check the packet and sowing instructions. This method works much better than simply scattering seed into your existing lawn, as the wildflowers introduced in this way are likely to be outcompeted by the grasses.

Examples of wildflowers and their requirements

For most soils, species like ox-eye daisy, betony, St John's-Wort, buttercup, yellow rattle, and selfheal.



For most soils, species like bugle, cuckooflower, ragged robin, common fleabane and marsh marigold.



Examples of some wildflowers and their requirements:

For chalky soils, species like salad burnet, field scabious, lady's bedstraw, cowslip, and wild carrot.



Salad burnet © Keith Aburrow



Field scabious © Mark Heighes



Cowslip © Jon Oakley



Wild carrot © Bob Chapman



Lady's bedstraw © David Kilbey

Method 2: Plug planting

Wildflowers can be introduced into lawns as pot-grown plants. These may be more successful than seed for planting into existing lawns. Plant them in small groups, in the autumn, to give the roots a chance to establish. Where possible it is better to use local varieties of plant as these have adapted to local conditions. You can either grow the plants yourself from seed or purchase them from plant nurseries.

For both of the above methods, prior to the planting, mow the grass regularly and remove the cuttings, in order to reduce fertility. After planting or sowing seed, it will be necessary to water and keep the plants clear of competition until established.

Method 3: Over-seeding

This method involves cutting your lawn very short, raking it hard to create bare patches of

soil and scattering seed. Whilst the wildflowers are establishing themselves the mower blades should be set on the highest setting.

Method 4: Creating a wildflower meadow from scratch

Good ground preparation is essential for a successful wildflower meadow – the secret being low-fertility soil. Fertile soil favours vigorous plants which can take over an area and prevent meadow plants from growing.

At the end of the summer, dig the area in which you wish to create a seed bed. For best results, remove the top 5 to 10cm of soil and then to rake the soil to produce a seed bed. Allow a few weeks for the soil to settle and to see what comes up. You may need to pull out any perennial weeds.

After a few weeks, you'll be ready to sow your wildflowers. Mix wildflower seed with a natural

grass mix (from a supplier of local, native seed) – a ratio of 1:3 wildflower seed to grass is best. Do not be tempted to sow it too thickly on the ground. Immediately after sowing, rake the bed lightly and firm with a small roller or the back of a spade for smaller areas.

If you're concerned about high fertility levels, but are unable to remove the top soil, another option is to create an annual flower patch instead, using plants such as poppies, cornflowers, corncockles and corn marigolds. These are annual plants that need disturbed soil to germinate. Once they have set seed, cut and remove the vegetation and rake over the soil so that there is open ground for them to grow in the next year.

Good cutting practice

Keep the following in mind when cutting your meadow.

- Cut from the centre outwards if possible, to allow creatures to escape.
- Leave havens of uncut vegetation. Cut these on a rotational basis.
- Remove cuttings to avoid smothering plants and invertebrates and to avoid increasing the fertility of the soil.
- Create compost piles.

Aftercare

You will need to look after your meadow to help it establish itself. Here are some top tips.

- Once the seeds have germinated, cut the meadow every 6 to 8 weeks, with the mower blades on the highest setting (to encourage root growth and to prevent the coarser grasses from dominating) and remove any unwanted species, such as creeping thistle, that may be dominating.
- Always remove cuttings after mowing so that the soil fertility does not increase.
- In subsequent years, for spring flowering meadows, don't mow until after mid-summer. Mow regularly during autumn. For summer flowering meadows, don't mow from June until late autumn.
- Cut hay from your meadow in dry weather and leave it on the ground for a few days before removing.
- Most importantly... all meadows are different, and the exact cutting regime will depend on a number of factors including species present, soil type and weather. The most important thing is to ensure that the meadow is cut at least once a year after the majority of the plants have flowered, and that the cuttings are removed.



Wildflower meadow on side of house © Jan Stroud



Wildflower meadow © Guy Edwardes/2020VISION



Barton Meadows © Martin De Retuerto

Window boxes and container

If you don't have a garden but have space for a window box, you could perhaps choose plants that are edible to us whilst also providing food for passing insects. You might choose thyme, chives, marjoram or lavender for example. Alternatively you could focus simply on wildflowers and plant some native wildflower seed in pots or purchase some plug plants for your containers. Use peat-free compost and ensure that your pots have drainage holes, covered with crocks. Once planted, keep them well watered and place in a sunny spot and you should be rewarded with a colourful display.

For further reading

If you would like to find out more about how to make space for nature in your garden or outdoor area, please see the wildlife gardening pages of our website at: hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening.

Based in Hayling, the Wildflower Island Project aims to help protect and enhance the natural beauty they have on their doorstep. They are joining Team Wilder in our efforts to go wild. Read their blog here: hiwwt.org.uk/blog/guest-blogger/wildflower-island-project.

Planting wildflower meadows on road verges and on council-owned land requires permission from your local authorities. Go to hiwwt.org.uk/team-wilder-resources-and-toolkits to find a list of documents on how to encourage your local authorities to create local wildflower meadows as well as resources on how to fund your own community projects.

Be a part of a bigger movement!

A barrier to planting wildflower meadows is the notion that they can be untidy and neighbours will complain. We are giving out plaques to be staked in the middle of your wildflower meadow that proudly state you are doing your bit to make Hampshire and the Isle of Wight wilder. Email Wilder@hiwwt.org.uk to get your free plaque today.

If you have any queries or would like to find out more about taking action for wildlife in your local area, please contact us at: Wilder@hiwwt.org.uk.



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