

Wildflower Meadows

Creating and maintaining flowering lawns and pots



Gone, but not forgotten are the heady days of fields full of rich and vibrant wildflowers. Victims of increased herbicide use and 'improved' agricultural practices, some arable 'weeds' are now quite rare.

But all is not lost.

Wildflowers can be grown at home, even by those without a garden as they can be sown in hanging baskets or window boxes.

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. Indeed they have evolved together and many species are inter-dependent for their survival. This fact sheet shows you how to help conserve our rich flora and fauna at home.

Spring or Summer Flowering?

Wildflower meadows fall into two broad camps. Those that flower in summer, July - August and those that flower in spring, February - May. Unfortunately, you cannot have both in the same area because they require different mowing regimes (see over). They can however, be grown in different parts of the garden or in different pots. In addition, you can plant an annual or perennial mix.

If you only have a small area of lawn, a spring meadow may be more practical because you can return it to a regular short mown lawn in time for the summer BBQs and parties. However, heavy use may damage some of the less hardy species.

Remember, wildflowers can also be grown in flower borders if you do not have a lawn.

Wildflower meadows are excellent for insects, birds and mammals



The Ringlet butterfly needs meadow grasses on which to breed



Annuals can be sown in spring or autumn

Field poppy
Cornflower * (see over)
Corn marigold \
Corncockle +
Corn chamomile

For a traditional look, add some cereals to the mix (wheat, oats or barley)

Cornfield Annuals

Annuals grow and flower in the same year and will be happy in rich fertile soils, unlike native perennials. These prefer a nutrient poor site. Annuals, often known as 'cornfield annuals,' can be sown in spring or autumn, although spring sowings often give a more colourful and varied display. Grass and weeds must be removed before the seed is sown.

After flowering and the seeds have set (Aug/Sept) the area can be cut to 50mm. The site will need to be deeply dug over or rotavated each spring to promote seed germination. Additional seed can be added in the first three years to build up the seed bank in the soil.

Seed should be sown at 5g/m². Roll soil after the seeds have been sown and water lightly.

Plants for Spring Flowering Meadows

Dropwort-
Foxglove*/
Black Medick-
Bluebell
Ox-eye-daisy-

Grape hyacinth
Primrose-/
Hoary plantain+
Sweet cicely
Cow parsley-*

Red campion/
Cowslip/
Selfheal+
Meadow buttercup-/
Oxlip-
Ribwort plantain+/
Wild daffodil



Cowslip

Plants for Summer Flowering Meadows

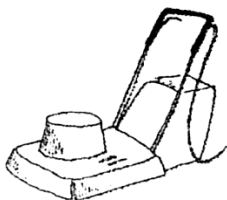
| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Autumn hawbit*+ | Feverfew | Meadowsweet*-=\ | Teasel*+>= |
| Betony* | Field scabious+\ | Musk mallow | Toadflax+ |
| Musk mallow-- | Foxglove*\ | Bird's-foot trefoil+-\ | Tufted vetch+* |
| Bladder campion/ Ox-eye-daisy- | Goatsbeard | Pignut- | Scentless mayweed*- |
| Greater knapweed*+>= | White campion\ | Wild carrot* | Common agrimony+>= |
| Perforate St John's Wort* | Purple loosestrife* | Red clover*- | Red campion\ |
| Common mallow | Ribwort plantain+\ | Yarrow*+ | Harebell |
| Viper's bugloss*+ | Hoary plantain+ | Yellow rattle | Devil's-bit scabious |
| Nettle leaved bell flower | Kidney vetch | Salad burnet | Lady's bedstraw\ |
| Lesser knapweed*+ | Dropwort- | Dryers greenweed | Selfheal+- |
| | Meadow cranesbill+ | Red clover /* | Small scabious*+- |

Key: * Good for bees + Good for butterflies - Good for insects = Good for birds \ Good for moths



Field scabious is popular with butterflies

For wildflowers suited to shady conditions, please see fact sheet 'Trees & Shade Plants'



Including grass

Grasses can complement perennial flower mixes. The following will not out-compete the flowers:

Red fescue
Crested dog's tail
Common bent
Meadow grass
Meadow foxtail
Quaking grass
Sweet vernal grass
Yellow oat grass

YOUR WILDFLOWER MEADOW

Preparing the soil on a dry day

As well as choosing the correct plants for your habitat, good ground preparation is the key to success. Perennial wildflowers require a soil low in nutrients. Highly fertile soils are better suited to cornfield annuals (see over.) For most areas, you will need to reduce soil fertility by removing the top soil. This will also help to get rid of unwanted grasses and weed seeds. If the soil is poor already, remove existing vegetation by hand. Scratch the bare soil with a rake, but don't rotavate it, as this can bring unwanted weed seeds to the surface.

Sowing the seed

Sow a wildflower and grass seed mix using 5g/m², with a ratio of 1 part wildflower: 4 parts grass/seed. Once the soil has been prepared as below, you are ready to sow your seed. Mix the seed with a little sand so you can see where you have sown it and scatter it on the ground. This can be done in autumn or spring. Once the seeds have been sown, roll the soil or walk over it to ensure the seed is in good contact with the soil. Water lightly. If it is a small area, place twiggy sticks over the bare soil to keep cats and birds off whilst the seed germinate.

Management first year

To help the flowers establish well, the meadow will need to be cut during the summer. The grass should be kept at 50mm and the cuttings removed. Unwanted weed growth like docks should be removed too. A perennial meadow will not usually flower in its first year.

Managing established meadows after the first year

The mowing regime for spring and summer meadows is different. A spring meadow is cut from late June to autumn. A summer meadow is often cut to 50-100mm height in March, then left uncut until late September/October. The grass should never be cut too short. A minimum height of 50mm is recommended. **All cuttings must be removed** to prevent nutrients building up in the soil. These can be composted.