

# Wildflower Grassland

### Wildflower Meadows

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. However all is not lost. Wildflower areas can be created within business grounds, or grown in flower borders or containers if there is limited space. 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.



### What do you have already?

You may be surprised if you can leave an area uncut at what comes up naturally, this will give you a good indication of your soil type. Local suppliers and local provenance will also give good guidance on what is likely to flourish on your site, which can avoid expensive mistakes or unrealistic expectations.



### Spring or Summer Flowering?

Wildflower grasslands fall into two broad camps:

- Spring Flowering: February – May
- Summer flowering: July – August

Unfortunately, you cannot have both in the same area because they require different mowing regimes. They can however, be grown in different parts of a site. In addition, you can plant an annual or perennial wildflower seed mix.

### Plants for Spring Flowering Meadows

Salad burnet	Ribwort plantain	Meadow buttercup	Cowslip
Red clover	Bird's-foot trefoil	Bluebell	Selfheal
Common vetch	Black medick	Sweet cicely	Red campion
Primrose	Hoary plantain	Ox-eye-daisy	

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Plants for Summer Flowering Meadows			
Autumn hawkbit	Tufted vetch	Red clover	Red campion
Meadowsweet	Pignut	St John's Wort	Salad burnet
Field scabious	Ox-eye-daisy	Ribwort plantain	Lesser knapweed
Musk mallow	Wild carrot	Yarrow	Devil's-bit scabious
Bird's-foot trefoil	Greater knapweed	Yellow rattle	Lady's bedstraw
Selfheal	Meadow cranesbill	Kidney vetch	Small scabious

Grasses can complement perennial wildflower mixes. The following native grasses will not out-compete the wildflowers:

Native Grasses		
Red fescue	Common bent	Crested dog's tail
Quaking grass	Meadow foxtail	Yellow oat grass

## Creating and Managing Your Wildflower Meadow

### 1. 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. For most areas, you will need to reduce soil fertility by removing the top soil which will also help to get rid of unwanted grasses and weed seeds. However, if the soil is already poor quality, cut back existing vegetation and rake over before sowing seed. Don't dig over the soil, as this can bring unwanted weed seeds to the surface.



### 2. Sowing the seed

Sow a wildflower and grass seed mix using 5g/m<sup>2</sup>. Once the soil has been prepared as above, 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.

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To make life easier it is possible to purchase bespoke seed mixes, which are specific to your site conditions. Additionally plug plants or wildflower seed mats can also be purchased which may establish faster although they will initially require a greater degree of maintenance i.e. watering!

### 3. 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 also be removed. A perennial meadow will not usually flower in its first year.

### 4. Managing Established Meadows *after the first year*

The mowing regime for spring and summer meadows is different. A spring meadow is left uncut until late June or early July. A summer meadow is often cut to 50-100mm height in March/April and then left uncut until late September. The grass should never be cut too short; a height between 50mm and 100mm is recommended. All cuttings must be removed to prevent nutrients building up in the soil.

### Cornfield Annuals



Annuals grow and flower in the same year and will be happy in rich fertile soils, unlike native perennials which 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. The site will need to be cleared of vegetation and then deeply dug over or rotovated prior to sowing. After flowering and once the seeds have set (Aug/Sept,) the area can be cleared and dug over or rotovated each spring to promote seed

germination. Additional seed should be added every year to build up the seed bank in the soil. Seed should be sown at 5g/m<sup>2</sup>. Roll soil after the seeds have been sown and water lightly.

#### Native Cornfield Annuals

Field poppy	Cornflower	Corn marigold
Corncockle	Corn chamomile	



Butterflies such as the ringlet and the meadow brown need meadow grasses on which to breed.

