



One Planet Matters

Creating a wildflower patch

Importance of wildflower meadows

Wildflower meadows act as feeding and nesting sites for many insects, birds, and small animals. Since the 1930s, we have lost 99% of our wildflower meadows in the UK, and those which are left are fragmented. These habitats are vital for the health of our ecosystems - and they impact humans too. About 35% of the world's crops need insects to pollinate them, so when we lose wildflower meadows, we not only lose insects, but also many of the food crops that we rely on!



'British wildflowers are under threat and therefore so are the pollinators they feed. Not only is it heartbreaking to lose the beauty and colour these native flowers give the UK landscape, but the plight of pollinators has a very real impact on the food we eat ourselves.'

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew Director, Richard Deverell



By planting wildflowers, we are supporting bees and other pollinating insects which are increasingly in decline. It is not only these insects that are threatened however, as when insect numbers decline, their predators also struggle. Hedgehogs, bats, and birds are just some of the types of wildlife that wildflower meadows support by supplying food (insects) and safe nesting sites.



Things to consider:



When to sow seeds

You can plant a wildflower patch in either March or April or in September, but often early Autumn will give best results as many wildflower seeds need to be planted before the winter in order to germinate in Spring. If you have heavy soil which often gets waterlogged, however, it may be best to sow seeds in the Spring so that they don't rot with waterlogging over Winter.



Annuals or perennials

It is important to decide whether you are going to plant annual wildflowers or perennials, and this decision will be based on the kind of soil that you have.

- ❖ **Annual wildflowers** (made up of cornfield annuals such as poppies) grow on fertile soil.
- ❖ **Perennial wildflowers** which make up natural wildflower meadows grow on unproductive soil. Some benefits of choosing these types of plants is that they will come back each year so you don't have to replant, and also that vigorous grasses will not outcompete the wildflowers once the area is established.

Some great annual seed mixes to choose include:

- Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*)
- Corn poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*)
- Corn marigold (*Glebionis segetum*)
- Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*)
- Barley and wheat seed will add a nice visual touch to the patch.



Some great perennial seed mixes to choose include:

- Birds-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)
- Common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*)
- Cowslip (*Primula veris*)
- Field scabious hoary (*Knautia arvensis*)
- Hoary plantain (*Plantago media*)
- Greater knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*)
- Common knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*)
- Lady's bedstraw (*Galium verum*)
- Meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*)
- Ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*)
- Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*)
- Wild carrot (*Daucus carota*)
- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- A range of grasses (not lawn grasses!) such as bents (*Agrostis spp.*), fescues (*Festuca spp.*) and crested dogstail (*Cynosurus cristatus*).



Where to plant your wildflower patch

Ideally, choose a location that is open and gets sunshine for most of the day. You can plant a wildflower patch on flat or sloping land, and can plant on a large or small area. If you can, choose an area as large as possible, so that you can grow a larger variety of flowers which will support more wildlife!



Method

1) Prepare the patch

- If you are planning on converting your lawn into a wildflower patch, be aware that it can take some years for the balance between grasses and flowers to establish. To help the process begin, it is advisable to stop feeding and weedkilling the area if you are currently doing this and mow the area weekly to weaken the grass.
- The most important thing to do when creating a wildflower meadow is to get rid of as much grass as possible from the area you want to convert. This is because grasses will compete with the wildflowers and generally take over the area faster than wildflowers can.
- There are several ways that you can do this, but we recommend either using a spade to take the top turf of grass away along with the top 3 to 6 inches of topsoil if you will be planting perennials. You could also cover the grass with a membrane or sheeting which blocks sunlight from the grass and will kill it. If you cover the grass for long enough, it will die and leave you with a blank canvas to work from. We suggest that you don't use herbicides as these can harm other wildlife.
- Removing the top 3 to 6 inches of topsoil is important when planting a perennial wildflower patch because this will reduce the fertility of the soil which is important for these flowers to thrive. If you don't want to remove the topsoil, instead you can plant mustards in the patch in the first year (you will still need to remove grass turf). Mustards are part of the brassica family and are heavy-feeders, meaning they take a lot of nutrients from the soil in order to grow, so growing them in the first year will reduce the fertility so it is ready for planting the following year. Oil-seed rape is another plant that you could use in the same way. Make sure you remove the plants when they are flowering and before they go to seed.

2) Suppress weeds

- Firstly you will need to rake the soil so that it is a fine tilth that resembles breadcrumbs.
- Then you want to remove any weeds by digging them up and by suppressing them with black plastic or weed control fabric. If you have lots of plants such as dock and nettle on your patch, this process of covering the soil could take up to a year to be effective in suppressing the plants.

3) Sow seeds

- You will need around 5 grams of seed per square metre of wildflower patch. Sprinkle your seeds evenly over the patch of land, and gently walk over the patch so that the seeds are in contact with the soil.

- You may need to net the patch until the seeds germinate in order to save them from being eaten by birds.

4) Water & patience!

- Water the area well, and continue to water until the seeds germinate. Once they sprout, they should be okay without regular watering.
- Make sure the area remains as undisturbed as possible - so try to keep children and pets from digging or disrupting the soil, as this will decrease the chances of germination.

5) Aftercare

- In midsummer during a hot period in the first growing season, cut the plants down and leave them on the ground for 2 days so that the seeds fall into the soil. Then remove the dried plant matter.
- In subsequent years, it is best to not mow the area from early April to late July, August or even early September, and to vary the timing of cutting each year so that you don't end up with one type of plant dominating the area. Make sure that if you're mowing in July, you leave an uncut area for grasshoppers and their nymphs to use as refuge, as they are most vulnerable at this time.
- During dry weather, cut the hay with a scythe or grass shears, and leave the plant matter on the ground for up to a week so that the seeds can drop to the ground. You can then compost the plant material that you remove.
- Mow the area a few more times during Autumn and then again in early Spring if it needs it. You may also want to look out for any nettles, thistles or dock which have managed to find their way back, and remove those by hand.
- Additional sowings may be required in the first few years to fill in spaces - or you could wait for them to naturally fill each year when plants self-seed.

6) Watch your wildflower patch evolve & enjoy the biodiversity!

- Your meadow should evolve each year and become more and more species-rich. Enjoy watching the different species visiting over time.
- Let us know how you get on! We would love to see photos and hear your wildflower meadow story. We also have [BioBlitz sheets](#) which you can print off from our website and use to track the biodiversity of your wildflower patch. Fill it in each year to see how the area progresses and what wildlife it is supporting!
- Wildlife to look out for: grasshoppers, bees, butterflies, birds, bats, spiders, millipedes, and so much more!



Learn more:

<https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/meadows-matter#:~:text=Why%20do%20meadows%20matter%3F&text=Wild%20flower%20meadows%20provide%20shelter,part%20in%20supporting%20the%20ecosystem.>

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway/features/meadow-musings---why-are-wildflowers-so-important>

<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/greenspace-in-practice/benefits-of-greenspace/wildflower-meadow-habitats/>

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/convert-lawn-meadow/#:~:text=The%20most%20important%20thing%20to,blank%20canvas%20to%20work%20from.>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/lawns/wildflower-meadow-establishment>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/create-a-wildflower-meadow/>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-grow-wild-patch-or-mini-meadow>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/lawns/wildflower-meadow-maintenance>