

# Creating a WILDFLOWER MEADOW



## What is a wildflower meadow?

The traditional wildflower meadow is a mixture of colourful wildflowers and grasses. Meadow flowers are usually perennial plants that can tolerate certain levels of grazing or cutting.

There are two different types of meadow: a spring flowering meadow and a summer flowering meadow. The types of flowers to be found in a meadow depend

on the soil conditions of that area, and also on how the meadow is managed. Traditionally, meadows were either grazed or cut for hay and the timing of this determines what wildflowers are found, as many flower and seed at different times of the year.

Wildflower meadows are very important feeding areas for birds. Many birds, such as the swallow and the house marten, feed on flying insects just above the meadow growth. Others, like sparrows and finches, feed on the seeds from the plants.



## Why are wildflower meadows disappearing?

Modern agriculture is based on a system of monoculture which is widely destructive to wild plant communities. Modern fields consist of few species with all weeds controlled by the use of herbicides, leaving an environment not conducive to wildlife communities. Wildflower meadows and hayfields have virtually disappeared due to the use of fertilisers, particularly herbicides, and vigorous agricultural grasses, such as perennial rye-grass. This type of grass is very aggressive and crowds out the establishment of any wild flowers or other grasses. To overcome the negative impact of modern agriculture, there has been a move to protect existing meadow habitats, and to create new meadow habitats.

## Why are they important?

Planting wildlife habitats is becoming increasingly important to our environment. The main reason for this is the impact of humans on existing wildlife habitats. This has mainly come about from agricultural development which has destroyed many types of wildlife habitats in the countryside.

The loss of meadows has had a huge impact on insect communities, particularly butterflies. Many of our native butterfly species are in retreat and moving towards extinction due to the loss of this habitat. Meadows, apart from being attractive, support a diverse range of insect life and also different food-plants for these insects. They also provide shelter for insects and even small mammals.



# How to create a wildflower meadow

Wildflower meadows are usually created by sowing with wildflower seed. It's possible to buy wildflower seed mixes but be careful not to have too many vigorous species as they will take over your garden. Alternatively, individual plants can be used for small areas. This is useful when planting into existing grassland. You can create a spring meadow or a summer meadow depending on your own particular preferences.

## The Spring Meadow

Seeds for a spring meadow should be planted in late September. This is the most suitable type of meadow for a school-garden as the flowers bloom in springtime during the school period. Some suitable flowers for a spring meadow are:

Lady's Smock  
Meadow Buttercup  
Daisy

Dandelion  
Cowslip

## The Summer Meadow

Seeds for a summer meadow should be planted in April. The summer meadow flowers between June and mid-September producing beautiful tall flowers which attract butterflies and bees. The grass should be left uncut during this period. Some suitable wildflowers are:

Greater Knapweed  
Devil's Bit Scabious  
Cornflower

Field Scabious  
Yarrow  
Poppy

Some other flowers which may appear are :

White Clover  
Birdsfoot Trefoil  
Speedwell

Cat's Ear  
Plantains  
Selfheal

## Sowing wildflower seeds

1) Remove the topsoil - this reduces the fertility of the soil which is needed for wildflowers to grow. Remove weeds by hand. Loosen the surface of the site, using a hoe for small areas or a rotavator for larger areas.

2) Mix the seed with no.1 lawn mixture at a ratio of 1:4. Divide the area into sections and divide the seed/grass mix into quarters. Sow one quarter from right to left, the next from left to right, the third perpendicular to this, from the top to the bottom, and the final one from the bottom to the top.

## Tips for Wildflower Meadows!

- A closely mown lawn along the edge of the meadow looks very attractive. Avoid straight edges to give a less managed look.
- A closely mown path through the meadow allows people to experience the meadow.
- Never use fertilisers on the meadow.
- If you already have a meadow in your area you can add to the wildflower content by removing tufts of grass and sowing seeds on these patches.

3) To help germination after sowing, rake the soil lightly. Gently press in the soil, to ensure that the seeds make contact with it.

4) As time passes, you can plant pot-grown wildflowers into the meadow. Some examples are:

Red Clover  
Common Vetch  
Rough Hawkbit  
White Clover  
Kidney Vetch

Black Medick  
Lesser Stitchwort  
Yellow Rattle  
Goatsbeard

## What can be found in a wildflower meadow?

When your wildflower meadow has become established you can examine the species diversity using quadrat sampling:

- Measure out approximately 1 square metre of your meadow and take note of all the different plant species and insect species which are present.
- Do this at different times of the year and note the changes which occur.

