

CREATE A WILDFLOWER LAWN OR MINI MEADOW IN YOUR GARDEN



Plant wildflowers in your garden to create a natural display that looks stunning and will also benefit bees, butterflies, birds and wildlife of all kinds. A wildflower lawn is easy to grow, beautiful when in full flower and low maintenance.



**BRITISH SOCIETY
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FIVE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN PLANNING YOUR SPACE:

- 1** **The size of the meadow area** can be as large or as small as you want it to be.
- 2** **Existing grass lawns** can be over-sown with a mix of wildflower and grass seeds or planted with wildflower plugs.
- 3** **Bare ground.** Wildflower meadows can be created from scratch by preparing the ground for sowing seeds.
- 4** **Work out the type of soil in your garden.** Some wildflowers and grass grow best in certain types of soil.
- 5** **Grow a wild lawn!** Just let your lawn grow wild and see what appears!

SOWING TIME

The best time to sow wildflowers is **either in the autumn** (between August and October) **or the spring** (between March and June). Generally, autumn is preferred because there are fewer risks from weeds!

WHAT TYPE OF WILDFLOWER MEADOW?

It is important to choose the meadow that will be most successful on the site you have to offer:

- ▶ **Perennial meadows** thrive best on poor soils because the grasses compete less with the wildflowers.
- ▶ **Annual meadows**, usually of cornfield annuals, need rich soils. These are a good choice where you are converting an existing border.



An open, sunny space works best!

POSITION OF YOUR WILDFLOWER GARDEN

Like most flowers and grass, wildflower plants will grow best in an open, sunny, non-shaded position in your garden. However, if your garden is mostly shaded you can sow hedgerow and woodland plants or seeds that will tolerate shady areas.

CHOOSING YOUR SEEDS

Wildflower seed suppliers supply mixtures of 100% wildflowers and wildflower and grass mixes suitable for various soil types and situations. Choose one that suits your local conditions. Where possible, purchase UK native seeds.



GROWING WILDFLOWERS ON AN EXISTING LAWN

Lawns can be converted into wildflower meadows, but please be aware it can take a number of years for the balance between grass and wildflowers to be established.

The grass and wildflowers you can sow, or encourage naturally over a longer period, will depend on the type of soil in your garden. Different wildflowers prefer different types of soil, i.e. clay, sandy, saturated or dry, but most wildflowers prefer soil without a lot of organic matter.

TOP TIPS TO PREPARE YOUR LAWN

- ▶ Stop using fertilisers and weedkillers.
- ▶ Continue mowing the grass weekly where possible to weaken the grass.*
- ▶ When you are ready to start your wildflower lawn, cut the grass very short and remove the clippings. Then, firmly rake the area removing as much of the thatch as possible to create open areas where seeds can get to the soil and germinate.
- ▶ Unless the soil has been heavily saturated with fertiliser or the lawn contains rye-grass or is very weedy, you won't need to remove any of the existing turf.**
- ▶ Sow a wildflower mix that suits your type of soil, at 1.5g per square metre. Then rake the area over after sowing to help the seed into the soil.
- ▶ As the seedlings start to show in the late autumn or spring, you will need to give your new wildflower lawn a mow, setting the blade fairly high to about 3 inches. This allows light to reach the emerging seedlings.
- ▶ In future seasons, your wildflower lawn should be left to grow to its natural height, to allow the flowers to naturally spread their seeds.

PLANTING WILDFLOWERS IN A LAWN

Transplanting meadow wildflowers from pots or plugs directly into your wild lawn is the quickest way to establish wildflowers into your wild lawn. This method is time-consuming and more expensive than seeding it, but will speed up the growth of wildflowers in your lawn.

- ▶ Wildflowers can be bought online as **pot plants** or as **plugs** and planted directly into an existing grass lawn. Do not take plants from the wild!
- ▶ Many wildflower suppliers offer plug plants that are ideal for planting into an established lawn. For a natural look, **plant in small groups** of the same plant.
- ▶ Try to **mix the species** and plant the wildflower plants informally, as if the seed had blown in on the breeze. Depending on your budget, plant as many as you can for a quick effect. However, they will reseed anyway in the autumn after flowering eventually covering the whole wildflower lawn.

* Most lawn grass is not that vigorous to be a problem, but it is helpful to reduce competition by existing grass anyway by sowing "Yellow Rattle" seed into the lawn. It is parasitic on the roots of grass, and once established will reduce the growth of the grass by about 50%. Yellow Rattle grows naturally in all established wildflower meadows and is sown between August and December as it needs a period of cold to germinate.

** When converting an existing lawn, you will need to remove all trace of rye-grass as it is vigorous and will compete with your wild flowers. You can't use weed killers because they are not selective and will kill the other grass. The only option is to dig the ryegrass out by hand, making sure none is left to spread its way back into your wildflower lawn. If the lawn is full of weeds, they will compete with wildflowers so will have to be dug out or treated with a suitable non-toxic weedkiller.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH ON BARE GROUND



Starting a mini wildflower meadow from scratch takes a bit of work, however the initial preparation and time required will be well worth it in the long run and requires very little maintenance.

OUR TOP TIPS

- ▶ Remove all weeds and debris. If necessary, use an appropriate non-toxic weed killer.
- ▶ If the area has been overtaken by weeds, it is important to reduce the number of weed seeds in the soil.
- ▶ It may be necessary to allow time for the first flush of weeds to germinate and then remove, before attempting to sow any wildflowers.
- ▶ For small areas, you can remove weeds by hand or cover with cardboard or a weed-suppressing membrane for at least three months prior to sowing.
- ▶ Try and use a space where the soil has low nutrients as wildflowers prefer it.
- ▶ Prepare the soil to a fine tilth once the weeds have been removed. Rake to remove stones and clods, aiming to create a fine, crumbly soil texture and a firm, level surface.
- ▶ Try not to disturb the soil any further as this may bring more weed seeds to the surface.
- ▶ Do not incorporate manure or fertiliser as high fertility encourages excessive vigour in grasses that then crowd out the wildflowers.
- ▶ Choose a wildflower mixture suitable for your soil conditions. Think about what your soil is like during the growing period from March to October (many soils can be wet and heavy during the winter).

- ▶ Wildflower seeds are best sown between late March and late October, with the ideal time being autumn, but avoid the hot summer months.
- ▶ Sow pure wildflower mixtures (100%) at a rate of 3g/m² and wildflower with grass mixtures at 5g/m². It should not be necessary to rake the seed over as the light helps germination in many species.
- ▶ It is advisable to mix the wildflower seed with a carrier (dry sand) to assist with sowing. This will help in distributing the seed evenly over a large area.
- ▶ The nurse grasses will appear within 7–10 days; the wildflowers may vary depending upon species – some may take only a few weeks, while others can take several months.
- ▶ Cornfield Annuals will flower the same year if sown during the spring or the previous autumn.
- ▶ Perennial wildflower species will establish during the first year of sowing and flower during the second year.

GROWING A WILD LAWN - THE DO-NOTHING APPROACH

This is an easy option; simply stop mowing and let your lawn or even a patch of lawn go wild. The grass will grow long, and wildflowers will grow naturally, creating a lovely wild lawn over time.

This method could, however, take a while! With a bit of luck, wind and birds' natural seed distribution will speed things up! Over the seasons, airborne seeds and seeds delivered by birds will slowly begin to build up, turning your lawn into a beautiful wildflower meadow. For this method, you don't need to be concerned with the type of soil you have; natural selection will be at work!



Sit back and let nature do the work!

WILDFLOWER MEADOW MAINTENANCE AND AFTERCARE

In general, you can leave your wildflower meadow to do its thing naturally. The following tips will help your meadow flourish year after year.



- ▶ Cut the wildflowers back to around 7.5–10cm in autumn, between August and October after the plants have all finished flowering.
- ▶ After cutting, you can leave the wildflowers and grass on the ground for about a week. This will allow the seeds that haven't yet dropped to dry out and fall into the soil.
- ▶ It is worth hand weeding out obvious weeds not in the seed mix during the first summer.
- ▶ A wildflower area doesn't require any additional watering or feeding. This could alter the natural balance of plants in the area as many native wildflowers prefer soil with minimal nutrients and water will only encourage excessive growth in grasses and weeds. If your wildflower area is quite small then a bit of watering during drier spells is recommended.



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