Plantlife's No Mow May – Join the movement and liberate your lawn

- **Daisies top list of top ten wild plants spotted on British lawns**
- **Cut less and later for nature – Plantlife reveals prime cut for fantastic flowering lawns**
- **Simple (in)action: Take the mower out of action this May**
- **Less mowing helps tackle climate emergency by reducing emissions, capturing carbon**

More and more people are embracing wilder lawns and the bountiful biodiversity benefits they bring says Plantlife, as it reveals that 92.4% of those who surveyed lawns last year (1) chose to No Mow May – give the lawnmower a month off and let wild flowers get summer ready.

Plantlife's No Mow May - the blossoming grassroots movement towards wilder lawns – benefits Spring wild plants as they are able to set seed before they are felled by mower blades. The increased plant diversity provided by letting a variety of wild plants get a foothold in May is a boon for pollinators, including bees and butterflies, who feed on plants through the summer.

Plantlife is highlighting the importance of garden lawns and green spaces against the backdrop of the alarming decline of grassland habitats. A staggering 97% of wildflower meadows have been eradicated in less than a century and this has moved once widespread plants like Ragged Robin, Field Scabious and Devil's-bit Scabious on to the Near Threatened list in England (2).

Considering the behavioural shift, Ian Dunn, CEO, Plantlife, said:

"The immaculate bright green bowling green lawn with its neat stripes may have historically been the desired garden aesthetic but, increasingly, we're seeing a cultural shift which sees wilder lawns buzzing with bees and butterflies becoming highly valued. A radical shift in attitudes towards lawn management is underway and it is to the benefit of plants, pollinators, people and planet."

As people prepare to let their lawns go wilder and let nature weave its magic this month Plantlife today (28 April) reveals the wild plants most recorded on British lawns (3). Daisies, Creeping Buttercup, Yellow Rattle, Common Birds'-foot Trefoil and Field Forget-me-not comprise the top five, with Meadow Buttercup, White Clover, Common Mouse-ear, Oxeye Daisy and Dandelion rounding out the top ten. The proliferation of Yellow Rattle on British lawns (4) is a biodiversity boost as the semi-parasitic plant possesses an unrivalled ability to act as 'nature's lawnmower', reducing coarser grasses and allowing more delicate wildflowers to flourish. The appearance of Common Birds'-foot Trefoil on lawns is especially great news for other wildlife; the 'super plant' - that resembles eggs and bacon - is a rich source of food for 140 different insect species.

On the eve of May, Nicola Hutchinson, Director of Conservation, Plantlife, issued a rallying call:

"Wild plants and fungi are the foundation of life and shape the world we live in. However, one in five British wildflowers is under threat and we need to urgently address and arrest the losses. With an estimated 23 million gardens in the UK (5) how lawns are tended makes a huge difference to the prospects for wild plants and other wildlife. The simple action of taking the mower out of action for

May can deliver big gains for nature, communities and the climate so we are encouraging all to liberate lawns as never before."

Sarah Shuttleworth, Senior Ecological Advisor, Plantlife, added:

"Swerving mowing in May doesn't only boost Spring wild flowers, it also allows people a little extra time to enjoy our glorious green spaces and connect with nature. This reclaimed time can be used to enjoy and explore wildlife friendly activities – like building a bug hotel, installing a wildlife pond or simply admiring the beauty of garden wildlife. From finches feeding on dandelion clocks to slowworms slithering in the sun there's so much to marvel at in wilder gardens."

A more relaxed mowing regime for our lawns can help combat the climate crisis in more ways than one. All of our garden lawns could add up to the size of Bedfordshire, covering as much as 125,000 hectares of Great Britain (6). Plantlife estimates they could be cut as many as 30 million times a year (7) under a weekly regime. This would be equivalent to the consumption of 45 million litres of petrol resulting in 80,000 tonnes of annual carbon dioxide emissions (8) or the combined carbon footprint of about 10,000 average households (9). However, the benefit of less mowing is not only felt above ground. Less regularly mown lawns are home to more, different species of wild plants and fungi. A greater diversity of roots has the potential to improve the carbon capture potential of soil beneath our lawns by as much as 10% - equivalent to 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (10). This is similar to the domestic annual emissions for Heavy Goods Vehicles in the UK (11).

Plantlife encourages nature lovers to No Mow May, but guidance does not suggest not mowing at all after May. Plantlife botanists recommend a balanced approach to lawn care throughout the year with collection of the cuttings. This can involve a mixture of shorter zones and taller, more structural areas, which will boost floral diversity and supports other garden wildlife too. Mowing twice a year will maintain a meadow. Mowing once every 4-6 weeks will maintain a shorter, re-flowering lawn where beauties like Bugle, Self-heal, Red Clover and Lady's Bedstraw can thrive.

Mark Schofield, Road Verges Advisor, Plantlife, commented:

"The removal of cuttings is crucial to encouraging plant diversity. When cuttings are left to rot down on lawns, this enriches the soil and creates an environment where more competitive grasses and species like nettles, hogweeds and thistles take over, smothering the rest of our wild flora. "

Ends

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Notes to editors:

1. Last May (2022) 92.4% of 1,897 Every Flower Counts (EFC) citizen science survey participants reported that they did not mow for a month before taking part in the survey, a rise from 33.6% in 2019.
2. A Vascular Plant Red Data List for England: http://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/England_Red_List_1.pdf
3. The plants most recorded by EFC participants in May 2022.
4. Sometimes known as 'meadow maker', Yellow Rattle is sown into lawns by nature lovers so this partly explains why it appears high on the list.

5. http://www.wlgf.org/garden_resource.htm
6. The total area of gardens in Great Britain has been calculated to be 521,872 hectares based on Ordnance Survey data presented in the UK Natural Capital: Urban Accounts 2019 report (ONS). Allowing for other garden uses including driveways, borders, patios, decking, and ponds we assume roughly one quarter is given over to lawns https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/uknaturalcapital/urbanaccounts
7. 22.5 m2 per minute can be cut by an average mower and domestic user. https://www.lawnmowingbusiness.co.uk/. Mowing once a week between March and October inclusive.
8. Lawn mowing frequency and its effects on biogenic and anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions (Lerman and Contosta 2019) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2018.10.016. This assumes all householders use small, pedestrian, petrol-powered lawn mowers. Electric mowers also have a carbon footprint.
9. Average carbon footprint of household in UK: https://heatable.co.uk/boiler-advice/average-carbon-footprint
10. Legacy effects of grassland management on soil carbon to depth (Ward et al. 2016) https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.13246
11. UK Government's Transport and Environment Statistics 2021: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-and-environment-statistics-autumn-2021/transport-and-environment-statistics-autumn-2021

Plantlife's No Mow May campaign, now in its fifth year, is the biodiversity boosting movement that has captured the imagination of gardeners and the public in Britain and across the globe. Participation has boomed year-on-year and Plantlife, with grassland conservation at the heart of its mission, is calling for everyone to cut less and later for nature and let our wildflowers get a head start on the summer. Plantlife's No Mow May is trademarked.