

 **Plantlife**



**Grow your own
wildflower meadow
in your garden**

Growing a wildflower meadow

As a nation of keen gardeners, Britain has a reputation for some of the world's most beautiful gardens. However, neatly clipped lawns and 'weeded' flower beds do not always make for a wildlife rich garden.

Increasing awareness of Britain's disappearing meadows and the loss of wild plants and wildlife, such as bumblebees and hedgehogs, has led to more of us creating wildflower meadows in our gardens.

This guide will tell you how to get started.

Getting started

You don't need to have a large garden to have a wildflower meadow, but you will need an open, sunny space.

An existing lawn is often the perfect place to start – if you fancy converting one, read the section 'From lawn to meadow'. Otherwise, follow these simple steps...



Yellow Rattle © Andrew Gagg / Plantlife

Starting from scratch

Step 1 Remove the topsoil

If you don't have an existing lawn, or want to take out your lawn, you will need to start a meadow from scratch – and an ideal time to do this is in July.

Wildflowers thrive on nutrient poor soil, so it is a good idea to completely remove your turf and 5cm of topsoil. You will need a strong spade and lots of energy, but it will be worth it.

Not only will this reduce nutrient levels, it is also a good opportunity to get rid of existing plant roots. Once you have removed the topsoil, rake over the ground until you have a fine tilth.

Step 2 Remove the competition

Leave the area for three to four weeks to see what comes up. It is likely that a spread of tougher wild plants may appear, so to ensure that your wildflower seed will have a good start, a session of pulling these out may be needed.

Step 3 Sow the seed

The best time of year to sow wildflower seed is from August to October.

You only need one or two teaspoonfuls of seed per square metre, which should be sown on a day with no wind.

Plantlife advises that it is important to buy your seed from a supplier that provides seed from native British plants. If you can, buy seed that is sourced locally as this will ensure that your flowers will grow happily in your area and be suitable for local wildlife.

Helpfully, most seed companies supply different mixes for different soil types. If you are unsure of your soil type, simple kits to test your soil's pH are available from garden centres.

Step 4 Adding Yellow Rattle and other species

Top tip! If your seed mix includes grasses make sure you sow some Yellow Rattle Seed – a pretty wildflower in its own right – as this semi-parasitic plant will help limit the growth of competing grasses, in favour of the wildflowers.

You could add some other flowers like Poppies and Cornflowers to give you some colour in your first year while your meadow plants are getting established but be aware that these are not traditional meadow species.



Wildflowers © Matt Pitts / Plantlife

From lawn to meadow

Step 1 Prepare the lawn

The older and 'wilder' your lawn the better!

If your lawn is like a bowling green, with fertile soil and no weeds, then the first thing you'll need to do is lower the nutrients in the soil.

Regular mowing and the removal of the cuttings will achieve this. This will take a year or two to get it down to the right nutrient level for wildflowers to thrive.

Step 2 Adding wildflowers

Step 1 will create the right conditions for your plants, you can then add wildflower seed to increase biodiversity. To do this, cut your lawn very short in the autumn and scarify it with a rake, creating patches of bare soil onto which you can scatter your seed. Make sure you sow a seed mix without any grass seeds, which includes Yellow rattle, as this plant helps to suppress grasses and creates more space for wildflowers.

You may see better results if you first grow your plants from seed in pots and then plant them outdoors. Sow the seed in autumn and leave the pots outside over winter, as many wildflowers need a cold spell before they can germinate. Transplant your seedlings into individual pots when they have three or four leaves and concentrate the growth on getting healthy roots by cutting off any flower stems. You can then plant them out into your lawn the following Autumn.

Mowing your meadow

Mow your meadow area after plants have finished flowering and set seed, normally between August – October. Then if possible, cut again at the end of winter to remove any old growth before spring. Don't forget to collect all the cuttings every time you mow.

Leave it uncut through spring and summer, allowing your wildflowers to flower and set seed.

When the flowers are no longer looking their best and have set seed in late summer, give it a thorough mow. You may want to leave the 'hay' out for a bit so that birds can feed on the seed. Don't forget to remove the cuttings soon afterwards, otherwise you may be adding unwanted nutrients.

These timings can be varied in different areas of the meadow to encourage different varieties of flowers. See overleaf for 'Recommended reading'.

Wildflowers for wild habitats

Wildflower meadows are great for wild insects and other animals, but if you have wild habitats nearby please do not spread seed outside the garden. Many wild habitats have taken centuries to develop so it is important that they do not become contaminated with seed from elsewhere.



Don't forget you can buy
British wildflower seed from
Plantlife's online shop.

shop.plantlife.org.uk



Recommended reading:

Creating a flower meadow

by Yvette Verner published by Green Books
ISBN: 1-9003-2208-0

How to make a wildlife garden

by Chris Baines published by Frances Lincoln
ISBN: 0-7112-1711-4

Making wildflower meadows

by Pam Lewis published by Frances Lincoln

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Bird's-foot-trefoil in lawn © Trevor Dines / Plantlife