

Encouraging Wildlife

Wildflowers are good for bees, which are declining fast, butterflies and hoverflies. Caterpillars eat the leaves and pupate on the stems or on the ground. Insects and seeds are good for birds and moths are good food for bats.



Photo: John Phillips



Photo: Derek Foster

Even a small wildflower patch can be good for other wildlife and especially if you have a pond or some rough ground nearby. If you leave some piles of sticks or leaves or broken crocks many forms of wildlife will be helped.

Newts, frogs, toads, hedgehogs, slow worms, grass snakes, voles and shrews can all find shelter and something to eat.

WHY HAVE A WILDFLOWER PATCH?

Wildflowers mean less mowing, give a show of flowers over quite a long period and are good for other wildlife. Many people get a lot of enjoyment from wildflowers.

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT?

Wildflowers will grow almost anywhere and it is not difficult to start with a small patch. Just decide not to mow for a while and see what grows.



Photo: Chris Parsons

Dean Meadows Group

Answering gardeners' questions

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Printed by Flying Colours Tel 01989 566443

Can I have a wildflower patch in my garden?

Can the grass I mow on the drive or roadside be used for wildflowers?

What can I do to make this happen?



Photo: Jan Winder

Dean Meadows Group

Gardening for a Wildflower Patch

Wildflower gardening is quite “hands off” as the plants are our native ones. They will look after themselves if your ground suits them. Nevertheless there are some rules to be followed.

The main thing is to allow flowers to set seed so do not mow until they have done so. Once you have mowed you can keep mowing as often as you like over the summer.

Secondly, you should remove the cuttings to help reduce soil fertility.

For an early meadow you could mow late in June. If you have Daffodils and Fritillaries in your grass, you might also get Cowslips, Cuckooflower, Celandines, Buttercups, Pignut, Bird’s-Foot Trefoil and Bluebells.



Photo: Derek Foster

For a later meadow, cut in late July or August. If you can wait till then many more plants including Common Spotted Orchids, Twayblades, Goatsbeard, Common Catsear, Agrimony, Yellow Rattle, Oxe-eye Daisies and Black Knapweed will seed and survive if the ground is favourable.

How should I start?

Dean Meadows Group advice is to see what comes up as it will be local species that like your situation and soil. If your lawn has not been reseeded with a lawn seed mix or recently fertilised you may be surprised by what is there.

You can start by mowing just part of a lawn or a strip or path so that the “wild” area is not too big – just see how you get on.

A lawn at The Meeting House, Flaxley, was allowed to grow wild for a year and by then it had 42 species of grasses and flowers.



Photo: Tim Wright

You can buy wildflower “turf” or seed mixes but we believe in using local sources and Dean Meadows Group sells seed to a nearby seed company. Perhaps you can get some seeds from a neighbour?

You can spread seed onto bare ground or into grass but, in grass, you may need first to discourage the vigorous grasses by mowing.

Mowing

At the first cut your wildflower patch will be quite long so a strimmer/ brushcutter might be needed. For a bigger area a sickle bar mower can be hired and you could share the use of it with a neighbour or gardening group. Small areas or slopes/ banks can be cut with shears or a grass hook.

It is important to remove the cuttings as this will reduce the fertility of the soil and this is best for wildflowers. High fertility encourages nettles and grass at the expense of wildflowers!

Composting

After the first cut and after mowing later on you should rake up the cuttings and remove them from your meadow area. Composting is a good way to use these cuttings and you can put it on your veg plot or another flower border as a soil conditioner or a mulch.



Photo: Derek Foster