

# WILD PATCH INFORMATION SHEET



## Long grass

### Create your Wild Patch

#### Don't cut the grass!

Lawns are generally made up of two or three species of grass and are cut regularly to keep the sward short. This 'monoculture' doesn't allow for many species

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Many of the 'blue' butterflies rely on ants as part of their lifecycle.

to flourish but by adjusting the management of your lawn you can quickly encourage a wider diversity of species.

If an area of lawn is left uncut the long grass provides the food needed by the caterpillars of a number of butterfly species and many other invertebrates. Also some bumblebees and solitary bees nest in the base of grass tussocks. Mowing a path around the area creates a neat and natural boundary and will make your Wild Patch look intentional rather than neglected. You could try a winding path through the area or even a maze!

Leave the grass uncut until late in the summer, or better still, leave it until the following spring to allow the grass-hibernating species to hatch. You'll soon notice more species like grasshoppers, butterflies and ants making their homes. When the grass is cut, remove the cuttings. This will help to reduce the fertility, promoting colonisation by a wider range of plants.

#### Leave the strimmer in the shed

Don't be too tidy! Rather than strimming around trees, along hedgerbanks, verges or corners, leave them to grow long to allow for hibernation and shelter and to create a 'natural corridor' for small creatures and mammals such as hedgehogs and shrews.

#### Introduce a few more plant species

Scrape and rake out some areas in the late autumn or early spring and sow or 'plug' plant with nectar-rich, low-growing species. Thyme, clover or chamomile are all hugely beneficial for bees. Continue to mow as normal if you want to, but have the cutter blades set higher to allow the flowers to develop.

Planting spring bulbs or primroses and cowslips amongst the grass provides early nectar for the bees and will be a splash of colour before the grasses grow too high.



#### In a nutshell...

Allowing grass to grow long, however big or small an area, is an easy way to create an important habitat for wildlife.

#### Further information

**British Wildflower Plants** [www.wildflowers.co.uk](http://www.wildflowers.co.uk)

**Buglife** [www.buglife.org.uk](http://www.buglife.org.uk)

**Bumblebee Conservation Trust** [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org)

**Butterfly Conservation** [www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)

**Emorgsgate Seeds** [www.wildseed.co.uk](http://www.wildseed.co.uk)

**Plantlife International** [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk)

**Really Wild Flowers** [www.reallywildflowers.co.uk](http://www.reallywildflowers.co.uk)

**The Royal Horticultural Society** [www.rhs.ork.uk](http://www.rhs.ork.uk)

**The Wildlife Garden Project** [www.wildlifegardenproject.com](http://www.wildlifegardenproject.com)

**The Wildlife Trusts** [www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk)

**Wild About Gardens** [www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk)

**Wildlife and wildlife gardening** [www.naturalsurroundings](http://www.naturalsurroundings)

#### Contact us

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## Meadows

### Create your Wild Patch

Our countryside was once full of meadows supporting a huge variety of flowering plants and wildlife but, since the 1930s, development and farming practices have destroyed nearly 100% of them. Growing a wildflower 'meadow', however big or small, is a wonderful way of creating a feeding and nesting ground for insects, birds and small animals.

It is important to make a distinction between perennial wildflower meadows and the more colourful cornfield annual 'plots' as they require different management and seeds.

Plants such as poppies, cornflowers and corn marigolds are **cornfield annual flowers** that would have proliferated in arable fields before modern herbicides were widely used.

A **perennial wildflower meadow** is an area of permanent grass where wildflowers grow. Infertile soil is best, where the grasses will not out-compete the flowers.

### Cornfield annual plot

In the past these colourful annual 'weeds' would have grown amongst the cereal crops, their seeds dropping on to the soil during the harvest. Over the winter the land was often left fallow and the flower seeds would be ploughed in to the ground the following spring.

Growing a cornfield annual plot necessitates preparing the ground each year, emulating traditional farming practices.

Prepare the ground first by stripping or spraying off grass or other vegetation. Disturb the earth by raking, digging or rotovating. In the autumn, sow annual seeds such as cornflower, corn cockle, corn marigold, corn chamomile and poppy. This should create a brilliant display the first summer after sowing. After flowering, allow the seeds to fall, then dig or turn over the soil the following spring. You may want to sow more seeds each year to ensure a good display.



A colourful cornfield annual plot mix of cornflowers, corn marigolds, corn chamomile and poppies.

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# WILD PATCH INFORMATION SHEET



## Meadows continued

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### Perennial wildflower meadow

The best time to create and sow your meadow is in late summer or autumn. Choose a suitable open and sunny place such as an area of lawn or a verge.

It's important to first reduce the fertility to ensure that the grasses don't dominate. This can be done by ideally removing the top three to six inches of topsoil, using a turf cutter, or a spade.

Dig the soil with a fork, getting rid of any weeds until you have a fine tilth resembling breadcrumbs.

There are many types of wildflower mixes to suit all soil types. These will include a range of perennial flowers and wild grasses.

Sowing should be done in the autumn. You need about five grams of seed per square metre of meadow. Broadcast the seed and then gently walk across it so that the seeds are in contact with the soil. Do not bury the seed. You may need a scarecrow or to net it from birds. Keep it well watered until established.

In the first growing season, cut or mow the growth in midsummer after flowering. Remove the cuttings. In subsequent seasons, you can vary the time of the cut (between June and September) to allow different plants to flourish. The hay may be too high for a mower so use a brush cutter or even a scythe! Leave it lying on the ground for up to a week for the seeds to drop, and then clear it all away to further reduce the fertility. Cuttings can be composted or used to create a habitat pile.

Give the meadow a couple more mows during the autumn and maybe once in early spring if it needs it. You may need to do some 'spot' weeding, to remove things like nettles, dock and thistles.

A perennial wildflower meadow will evolve year by year. Bees and butterflies, grasshoppers and birds will be just some of the wildlife that will benefit.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**Introducing yellow rattle can help reduce the vigorous grasses in a meadow. It is a hemiparasite, fixing its roots on to the root system of an adjacent grass and extracting the water and minerals it needs. This weakens the grass allowing the more delicate wild flowers to thrive.**



#### In a nutshell...

Creating a meadow takes some careful preparation but the enjoyment and huge benefit to a wide variety of wildlife is worth the effort.

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