



Maintenance and after care of newly laid wildflower turf

Watering

Once laid, water the turf thoroughly for the first week if the weather is dry. If the soil is not soaked before laying, it is important to check that this initial watering soaks through to the soil beneath the turf. During this watering, check by lifting a corner of the turf to ensure that the soil is damp.

Do not allow the turf to dry out before it establishes and is rooted – roughly two to four weeks.

For the first growing season, it is important to water the turf occasionally during extended dry spells.

Once well established, the wildflower turf will cope well with most circumstances, but the flowers will benefit from watering during very dry periods.

Fertiliser

Never apply fertiliser to wildflower turf.

Ongoing maintenance

There are several options for subsequent management depending on the soil fertility, the weather conditions in the individual seasons and what your objectives are.

Most people tend to cut down the meadow once per year during the late autumn after seed heads have set, but some prefer to also make an interim medium height cut during the summer. Mowing of your wildflower meadow can be carried out with a heavy-duty mower or strimmer/brush cutter. Mow short to about 25mm so light can get into the sward during the winter. It is vitally important that the cuttings are always removed.

If the soil is fertile, or the growing season is especially good, this can result in very strong growth which will eventually cause lodging (falling over) and looking untidy in the summer. In this case, the management regime can be modified where an additional cut in summer can be introduced. Cutting at this time reduces the grasses' vigour, results in a shorter sward and a later flowering.

An open sward over the winter ensures healthy, disease free plants which can benefit from what light is available to them over the winter months. As spring approaches, the wildflowers and grasses are in the perfect condition to develop flowers and seed heads quickly and to repeat their perennial cycle thus guaranteeing a wildflower meadow year after year.

Mowing or cutting

Cutting a meadow helps maintain a diverse mix of flowers and grasses and depending on the timing of cut can allow a gardener to manipulate the range of wildflowers that thrive.

New meadows

To encourage perennial flowers and grasses to make good root development, it is important to mow the meadow in the first year after sowing. Cut to a height of 5cm (2in) after about six-to-eight weeks of growth and repeat every two months throughout the first summer.

Established meadows



These can be cut at several times in the year, depending on the vigour of the meadow and which types of flowers wish to be encouraged. The key cuts of the season fall roughly into three times of year and a perennial meadow can be managed effectively with one or more of these cuts.

Spring cut - this is useful for meadows where grass growth is very lush. Cut back to height of 7.5cm (3in) only and complete this cut no later than the end of April. It can also be used in conjunction with sowing yellow rattle in August (see Problems section) to help manage grass-dominant meadows.

Main summer cut - this is also referred to as the 'hay cut' and removes the bulk of the material, allowing it to either be baled or composted. This cut is done between late June and the end of August; the earlier cutting favours spring flowers such as cowslips, fritillary, lady's smock, selfheal and bugle; the later cutting favours summer flowers such as knapweed, devil's bit scabious and lady's bedstraw.

Autumn cut - particularly useful for fertile sites, one or two cuts between the end of August and late November removes surplus growth and helps keep grasses at bay to allow the wildflowers to persist.

Following the last cut of the season, all meadows can be kept mown to keep the grass short and neat through the winter is desired. Any cut that produces substantial clippings should have the clippings removed and composted.

General tips

It is usually a good idea to leave the initial mowing's in situ for a few days to allow seed to drop to the ground but then it is important to collect mowing's to reduce soil fertility

Aim for the first cut to be 5-7.5cm (2-3in) high. Subsequent cuts can be lower to 4cm (1½in)

Many lawnmowers will struggle with long grass. Small areas can be cut with a hand scythe or trimmer (though a trimmer has the tendency to chop up the material quite small, making it harder to remove with a rake). Larger areas are best tackled with a heavy-duty mower (e.g. sickle-bar mowers and motor scythes) or a two-wheel trimmer

Watering and feeding

A wildflower area does not require any additional watering or feeding. This could alter the natural balance of plants in the area. Many native flowers colonise poor land and the addition of extra nutrients and water will only encourage excessive vigour in the grasses, which will consequently out-compete the more desirable flowering plants.

Problems

The main problem that is likely to be encountered is an abundance of weeds or dominant grasses.

Perennial weeds - docks, thistles, and nettles for example - pull these out by hand before they set seed. Nettles can be knocked back by repeated cutting. As a last resort SBK Brushwood Killer can be considered for spot treating perennial weeds. It will leave long grass unharmed but may damage wildflowers so use with care. Lawn weed killers should not be used, as these will kill the wildflowers you wish to encourage

Where grasses become dominant try sowing the annual wildflower, yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) which is semi-parasitic on grasses. Sow this in August and keep the grass mown until March.