



# Creating a wildflower meadow

98% of Britain's flower-rich grasslands, such as hay meadows and chalk downlands, have been lost in the last 60 years. Sadly, this was once one of the best places for bumblebees and a range of other wildlife. However, you can help by creating your own miniature wildflower meadow. Even a small patch of flower-rich grassland can support a host of wildlife, including insects, mammals and birds.



For best results, choose a piece of ground with low soil fertility; for example a waste area where the soil is full of rubble, or where the topsoil has been stripped away. Failing that, it is possible to take off the top few inches of soil. But even without these measures, you should still get impressive results. If the soil is too fertile you will suffer from encroachment by weeds such as fast growing grasses and nettles, but these can be pulled out by hand to keep them in check. Slowly, over time, the soil fertility should drop and they should become less of a problem.

For a large area, it is probably better to sow a wildflower meadow seed mix in the spring (April-May time). Most mixes contain some annuals, such as cornflower and poppies, which will put on a good show in the first year. These will then tend to disappear as the perennials take over.

For a small area, you can speed things up by planting seedlings or larger plants into an existing patch of lawn. Sow some seeds in the early autumn in pots outside, and leave them there until the spring. The winter frosts are necessary to help many species germinate. The

seedlings should be ready to pot on by mid-spring. You can plant them straight out at this stage, but if you do many will never establish. It is best to grow them on to be sturdy plants and then plant them out in the autumn a year after they were sown.

## Mowing

Timing and frequency of mowing is crucial in determining which flowers will flourish in your meadow. If you are lucky enough to have a big garden you can mow different areas at different times, and so have the best of all worlds. For spring flowers such as cowslips, yellow rattle and self-heal, much loved by bumblebee queens, do not mow until late June, but afterwards mow regularly through the summer. To encourage the summer meadow flowers that will bring a swarm of bumblebee workers in July and August, cut regularly until April but then do not cut at all until September. This will encourage bumblebee favourites such as knapweed (*Centaurea* spp.), scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) and various clovers, vetches and trefoils. This treatment is also best for much other wildlife, particularly small mammals and grasshoppers.

Spring meadow	Summer meadow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bugle (<i>Ajuga reptans</i>)</li> <li>▪ Dandelion (<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>).</li> <li>▪ Lady's smock (<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>).</li> <li>▪ Cowslip (<i>Primula veris</i>).</li> <li>▪ Self-heal (<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>)</li> <li>▪ Snake's-head fritillary (<i>Fritillaria meleagris</i>).</li> <li>▪ Yellow rattle (<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bird's foot trefoil (<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>)</li> <li>▪ Field scabious (<i>Knautia arvensis</i>)</li> <li>▪ Knapweeds (<i>Centaurea</i> spp.)</li> <li>▪ Meadow cranes-bill (<i>Geranium pratense</i>)</li> <li>▪ Melilot (<i>Melilotus altissima</i>)</li> <li>▪ Red bartsia (<i>Odontites verna</i>)</li> <li>▪ Red clover (<i>Trifolium pratense</i>)</li> <li>▪ Sainfoin (<i>Onobrychis viciifolia</i>)</li> <li>▪ St John's wort (<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>)</li> <li>▪ White clover (<i>Trifolium repens</i>)</li> <li>▪ Yellow rattle (<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>)</li> </ul>

### **Bumblebee Conservation Trust**

School of Biological & Environmental Sciences, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA

[www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk](http://www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk)