

# Wildflower meadows guidance

## Background

Sowing of non-native wildflower seed may pose a risk to the environment if the wrong species are sown in the wrong location. They may compete with native plants, cause genetic dilution of local varieties, or the creation of a sown meadow in the wrong place may cause damage to pre-existing important habitats.

As a small island, Guernsey is particularly sensitive to these risks due to its unique and vulnerable ecology; the nature of its landscape (being a complex patchwork of urban, semi-urban and natural land) and the close proximity of gardens to areas of high nature conservation value.

The following guidance aims to suggest ways in which these risks can be mitigated whilst being proportionate to the sensitivity of different sites, species and habitats.

## Guidance

*The following advice relates to the creation of 'wildflower meadows'. It relates to existing domestic curtilages, to land where a change of use is being considered and landscaping schemes within new development sites.*

1. The first consideration should be whether the site should be sown with wildflower seed as many habitats are already of ecological value and the act of creating a 'wildflower meadow' may reduce its value. We recommend that only 'amenity grassland'<sup>1</sup> or 'improved grassland'<sup>2</sup> is considered for conversion to a sown 'wildflower meadow'.
2. We would recommend that grasslands which have not been cultivated<sup>3</sup> for the past 8 years are not sown with wildflower seed. Instead, management should be altered to encourage the growth of native wildflowers which may be within the existing seedbank. Many landowners have seen the value of this when participating in 'No Mow May' and have seen rare plants and orchids appear within their lawns. Appropriate management will vary between sites but is generally considered to be cutting and removing the arising once or twice per year. Further guidance on this is available via the Magnificent Meadows website ([www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk](http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk)). If, following 3 years of this management there remains a poor diversity of wildflowers (such as less than 6 species per m<sup>2</sup>), it may be beneficial to over-sow<sup>4</sup> or plant with native, locally sourced wildflowers. Also in this instance, and within a domestic garden which is at least 100m

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<sup>1</sup> Amenity grassland is intensively managed and closely mown grasslands.

<sup>2</sup> Improved grassland has been agriculturally improved with applications of fertilisers or pesticides which has reduced the abundance of plants within the sward to less than 8spp/m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> In this situation, we would consider cultivation to be rotovated and resown or treated with fertilisers. High mowing frequency is not considered 'cultivation'.

<sup>4</sup> scatter seed over the existing grassland which should be gently scarified to create some bare ground.

from a SSS (see point 3 below), the landowner may then wish to consider sowing a 'wildflower meadow', using suitable seed.

3. For domestic curtilages which are within 100m of a SSS (or close to other sensitive areas such as ABIs or Nature Reserves), non-native, non-local wildflower seeds should not be sown. If land in this circumstance requires seeding, this should be done with locally harvested seed or green hay from an appropriate donor site. N.B., sites which have previously been sown with non-local seed are not considered suitable donor sites.
4. Within domestic curtilages which are at least 100m from a SSS and contain cultivated amenity grassland (i.e. they have been cultivated within the last 8 years), wildflower meadows may be created with little risk to the environment, however we would encourage landowners to carefully consider the seed choice to ensure that no potentially invasive species are sown. It should also be borne in mind that native plants support a greater diversity of associated species, and so would encourage the use of native wildflower seed wherever possible.

### **Sourcing local or native seed mixes**

Local wildflower seed can be obtained through Grow Guernsey Natives, an initiative of La Societe Guernesaise Botany Section.

Guernsey appropriate seed mixes have been produced by two UK seed producers through consultation with local environmental charities. Domestic or commercial quantities of these mixes can be obtained through Environment Guernsey.

### **Planting scheme**

The following species lists are suggested species for different conditions, these are taken from the Biodiversity Guidance for gardens and the built environment which is soon to be published (expected Q4 2022).

#### *Soil types in your garden*

The soil type of your garden will have a large influence over what will grow well, or what may struggle. This is because some plants grow better in different soils and some wildlife is adapted to live in varying conditions. One of the best ways to ensure that your planting scheme will work for your garden, and encourage the most amount of wildlife, is to look at natural areas in your vicinity to see what is growing there naturally then base your planting scheme around this. Just be sure to avoid any potentially invasive species!

#### *By the Sea:*

Gardens near the sea can often suffer from salty, dry and sandy soil and many typical garden plants can struggle in these conditions. There are many attractive native plant species that will not only thrive in these conditions, but will also support a wealth of native wildlife, such as thrift, sea kale and sea holly. For hedging, gorse and blackthorn are well adapted to salty soils and can be effective wind breaks to allow other plants to establish.

If you want to have plants in your garden that require better soil, then try using planters and pots to hold compost and soil in. Alternatively, you might want to try and improve the soil condition in some of your flower beds by reducing the water loss through the free draining sandy soil. Try using a mulch like woodchip on top of your soil to lock in some moisture or by improving the soil by digging in organic matter to improve water retention.

Other species you could plant include:

- Wild thyme
- Rest-harrow
- Birds-foot trefoil
- Wild carrot
- Bulbous buttercup
- Yarrow
- Lady's bedstraw
- Early forget-me-not
- Sea campion
- Sea pink

*Dry:*

Guernsey's dry areas of soil away from the influence of the sea are mainly made up of silty and acidic soil. This means that many plants that prefer calcareous or neutral soils can often struggle to grow in this environment. But there are several native species that are perfectly adapted to these soils.

You may want to consider planting:

- Yarrow
- Ox-eye daisy
- White clover
- Red clover
- Knapweed
- Selfheal
- Meadow buttercup
- Bluebell (English)
- Birds-foot trefoil
- Dog violet

*Wet:*

If you live in a wetter area in land and not influenced by the sea then the soil is likely to be acidic but will hold and retain water for large parts of the year. This may be caused by flushes, wet valleys or low-lying wetlands that sit close to the water table. There are lots of species in Guernsey which are perfectly adapted to these wet soils and many make a very attractive additions to a garden, as well as enhancing the biodiversity.

Example plants you could consider for your garden include:

- Lesser spearwort
- Red clover
- Ragged robbin
- Water mint
- Yellow bartsia
- Amphibious bistort
- Cuckoo flower
- Yellow flag Iris

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