Shearsby Nature Group

Wildflower Meadows

By definition, wildflowers are our native flowers, they are unaltered by people unlike the flowers in your garden.

A wildflower meadow is very nature-friendly, which benefits many pollinators and other wildlife. In the UK, traditional wildflower meadows have **declined by more than 97 per cent since the 1930s**. This has been primarily due to agricultural intensification and occasionally to neglect. There has also been an estimated 60 per cent decline in insects over the last 20 years.

Wildflower meadows are incredibly diverse, offering a rich mix of flowers for pollinators, grasses for butterflies and moths to lay their eggs on, and shelter for anything from grasshoppers and crickets, beetles, hedgehogs, and amphibians. In turn, the greater density of insects in a wildflower meadow provides food for birds and bats.

A single healthy meadow can be home to over 100 species of wildflowers, which in turn supports other meadow wildlife. For example, common bird's-foot trefoil is a food plant for 160 species of insects, which in turn support mammals and birds.

Wildflowers provide bees, butterflies and other pollinators with food throughout the year. On a single day in summer, one acre of wildflower meadow can contain 3 million flowers, producing 1 kg of nectar sugar. That's enough to support nearly 96,000 honeybees per day.

Over **a third of the world's food** relies on insects to pollinate them

Also importantly well-established wildflower meadows have complex root systems, which makes the soil very stable. This helps to mitigate flooding by holding on to rainwater and stops nutrients from washing away.

Many native wildflowers contain compounds which have made a significant contribution to modern medicine. Flowers such as self-heal have antibiotic properties, foxgloves contain a compound called digitalin that can be used to treat heart disease.

Wildflower-rich meadows are also created by farmers to produce winter food for livestock. The wide range of flowering plants and grasses provides a highly nutritional crop, with an increased protein and mineral content in the forage which is amazing benefit to livestock.

Below is a guide on how to create your own small wildflower patch in a container, give it a go!

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Wildflower planters - grow wildflowers in a container

Growing native wildflowers is a great way to provide the right food for pollinating insects, improving your local wildlife.

The best time to start this gardening project in the spring or autumn.

What you need:

- suitable pot or planter
- peat-free compost
- garden soil
- rocks and stones
- wildflower seeds (native and maybe one without grass in the mix)

1. Prepare your pot

Make sure your pot has good drainage so that the soil doesn't become waterlogged.
Check that it has holes in the bottom, if not make some holes, then place a layer of rocks and stones in the base.

Mix equal amounts of soil and compost together (wildflowers prefer nutrient-poorer soil).

Fill the pot with the soil/compost mixture, to roughly within 2.5 cm from the top.

2. Sow your native wildflower seeds

Sprinkle your seeds thinly and evenly on the surface of the soil/compost mixture. Then cover with 1cm of your soil/compost mixture.

Water well and be careful not to disrupt the seeds.

3. Germination and growth

Place your pot in a sunny spot and leave to grow. Water regularly so the pot doesn’t dry out, but don’t over water!
Your plants will flower at different times, depending on what is in your chosen seed mix. Some plants might not flower until the second year.

4. Maintaining your wildflower pot

When the flowers have bloomed and faded, leave them to go to seed. You can collect the seeds and use them for another pot. Once everything has flowered, cut back the plant growth to around 2.5cm high.

Next year your plants will flower again. Depending on your seed mix, different species may predominate. Watch out for any vigorous invasive plants that might crowd out your wildflowers. Weed these out!