

## How to make and maintain mini-meadows Adrian Thomas

Edited Chat from the zoom webinar 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024

*Many affirmative comments and thanks edited out, and where possible answers or follow-up chat is associated with the initial question.*

Mark Goddard: Good evening all, I'm Mark one of the forum trustees and I'll be collating your questions for Adrian tonight. Please do pop your question(s) here in the chat, along with your name and where you're joining from and I'll put a selection to Adrian at the end. Enjoy the talk

Jenny Mindell: How **small** can a mini meadow be? And what about a garden with minimal sun?

Bryan Oak: I didn't cut my lawn/wild flower area back last autumn. When's the **best time for me to get it cut back** for this Spring?

Vikki Anson Broadbent Fold Primary: This what I need to know!

Fiona Prior: Is there a **catalogue of meadows in** the uk that we can visit?

Helen Pedder: I've got a 2-year old mini meadow patch within our lawn. Any suggests how to **reduce the amount of wildflowers** that have started massively **seeding themselves in the lawn** - especially hawkbits/weeds/beards? My dad has agreed to the wildflower patch but wants to keep his lawn around it...!

Amanda: I would try to persuade your dad that the wildflowers support so much more life than basic lawns. perhaps start a new lawn somewhere else?

Helen Pedder: Only one garden - only one lawn. He has eventually agreed to the patch as he sees that the flowers support more insects etc, but still very lawn proud otherwise (lawn mowed in neat stripes etc). Without using weedkiller the hawkbit is rapidly taking over everything (plus blowing seeds onto the neighbour's lawns too, which is awkward..)

Amanda: Wildflowers don't like rich soil, so perhaps add or dig in more compost?

Alison: Meadow envy! I have 2 questions that may be covered later but:1. I have a mini meadow (very mini) that's in a relatively shady bit of my garden; only practical place to put it but it's always a bit rubbish, any **tips for a good meadow in less than full sun?** 2. How do you get a good mix of plants? I've seeded mine (multiple times) with all sorts of things but it tends to get taken over by one or two species; initially it was oxeye daisies but more recently it's sorrel. I pull out loads of it as soon as I see it but it's very prolific and crowds out most other stuff.Thanks Alison (Hitchin, Herts)

David Riddle: Suggest growing hedgerow wildflowers such as cow parsley, foxgloves, red campion if meadow in shade. Cut back once in late september

Noreen Blanluet: Best explanation I've heard of meadow and of the **difference with cornfield annuals!!**

Fiona Prior: Can you create a meadow using **no dig methods?**

Noreen Blanluet I second this Q!

David Riddle: yes if clear off growth-cover with carpet for year. Then remove, rake to create seedbed and sow

Andy: do you need **low nutrition soil** for wildflower meadows?

Andy: what's your view on the poor/ landscape substrate as a growing medium- crushed concrete and porcelain?

Alderson: I have part of enclosed pasture field. already has lots of buttercups and few other species. **would I have to dig** or can I improve the variety of plants by planting? Somerset.

Amanda: Yes, I think so, I dug out 5 - 10 cm before sowing

Peter Almond: So what was in the seed

Judy: I've just planted a 2m x 1m section of native grasses that are good larval **foodplants for moths and butterflies**. But if I mow it in the autumn or spring surely, I'll be destroying the eggs, caterpillars or pupae? **Should I be leaving it totally unmowed?**

Laura Heybrook: What about **insect eggs etc if you mow?**

gwil: yes I would like to know this too please!

Harrop: can you recommend any good **haymeadow** seed mixes?

Fiona: Do you recommend adding yellow rattle to keep the grass down, as that was what we were told to do but had no success in germinating it.

Judith Conroy: The seed needs to be fresh and sown in autumn - I think Adrian will likely talk about rattle at some point :-)

Lucy Williams: What **time of year** do you dig and sow a meadow?

Judith Conroy: Generally autumn but other times are possible. I think Adrian will cover this.

Fiona: If your garden is really, really tiny (or for example just a balcony), can you do a **mini meadow in a pot**, or would you be better to stick to cornfield annuals for that situation?

Richard Godbehere: Absolutely agree. **Gardens and urban green spaces** allow nature to flow through these areas, and connect up larger core habitat

Andy: are all your seeds **native**?

Elaine: Can you share your **top perennial meadow plants** to sow from seeds please?

Juliet Demetriou: Can you please email a list of wild flower names

Mark Goddard: For a really **useful guide to creating a meadow** in your garden please see this information sheet on the wildlife gardening forum website

[https://www.wlgf.org/ht\\_meadow.pdf](https://www.wlgf.org/ht_meadow.pdf)

This also includes list of **recommended plant species**

Sharon Curry: If I already have a grass based area, (very small, part of my garden) just like your mums. some clover, moss, dandelions and daisies. **What should I do next?** My thought was to cut the grass very low, scarify it and sow cornfield annuals. I was hoping for the burst of colour but am seeing already from

Adrian that that should not be the aim. But I would like to have more colour. As an aside, I have had hedgehogs...but I think they went on. I have had frogs, but don't think I have them now. I am planning a wildlife pond :-)

Claire Maycock: **Ragwort** came up in my lawn when I left it - it was soon covered in the caterpillars of cinnabar moths!

Sharon Curry: I am on my own, and my **back is bad**, so getting the **grass back to zero is not an option for me.**

Helen Pedder: Sharon Curry - After my first year of simply leaving my lawn patch to do it's own thing, the second autumn I did the scarify thing (but not as much as in the photos, just to create patches) and sowed yellow rattle seeds. They were amazing the following year and I'm hopeful they'll help control the grasses so other wildflowers can get a hold... we'll see!

Alison: I simply cannot get **yellow rattle** to establish. I've tried everything: sowing in spring, sowing in autumn, putting it in the fridge, not putting it in the fridge and a couple of years ago even forked out for plug plants but no joy, they just disappeared. ?

Vikki Anson Broadbent Fold Primary: I cant get yellow rattle to establish either

Helen Pedder: My yellow rattle seeds were freshly collected (with permission) from a local meadow and almost immediately sown onto scarified ground and walked over. I have been warned that it can die out before really establishing, so I've only had one year of it so far... hoping it appears again this year!

Amanda: I've heard yellow rattle only parasitizes certain species of grass, is that true?

Jo: Does yellow rattle parasitise couch grass or best to dig it out.

Juliet Demetriou: **I didn't mow my lawn** last spring and was amazed at the flowers and insects

iPad Martin U: Hello, what do you do **with unwanted plants in your meadow**, i.e docks, nettles and worse of all ground elder. I am aware of benefits of above, and my meadow is located in a woodland garden

Judith Conroy: Docks and nettles can be dug out/spot-weeded/continually cut off (depending on size of meadow and amount of time you have). I think Adrian will cover this.

Fiona Prior: What would **overpower a meadow** and need weeding out?

Amanda: There a case for letting these unwanted plants things be, other things come along and it changes year to year I pull up something like Sorrel or nettle just a bit if there's too much and then find that they are more balanced next year..

Fiona Prior: My old lawn is mostly **couch grass**... do I need to remove it first?

Jenny Mindell: My husband gets very **bad hayfever**. Any suggestions?

Peter Almond: Adrian still hasn't said **what he actually sows**

Bryan Oak: I've tried some **plugs** but they didn't take. Not sure what I did wrong.

Judith Conroy: Plugs can need quite a bit of watering in and ruffling of the surrounding soil to allow the roots to get in. It is also important to cover the top of the plug as the moisture can wick out.

Louise: What do you do in **autumn/winter** - I have just left the dead stuff

Beth Anderson: can I have a **meadow that I don't mow at all?**

Steve Head: Not really - the essence of meadows is management - by cutting or grazing - you could borrow a sheep!

felicianorman: I would also like to know if you can just leave a lawn and never mow, apart from having mowed lawn paths in it

Susan Harrison: Don't be too quick to dig up **existing grassy areas** as they may already contain the seeds of interesting wild plants. Do a **bioblitz** first before destroying existing wild plants.

Sharon Curry: what is a bioblitz?

Judith Conroy: <https://nbn.org.uk/tools-and-resources/useful-websites/national-bioblitz-network/#:~:text=A%20BioBlitz%20is%20a%2024,and%20other%20organisms%20as%20possible> .

Camille: Do the steps also work for **heavy (and compacted) clay soils**, or is another step required?

Judith Conroy: You might need to spend longer creating a 'fine tilth' and different species that will enjoy/tolerate clay. There are seed mixes specially for clay.

Martin Angel: Please advise how to cope with Clay gardens

Elaine: I have some **large ant hills** in my meadow- is that a problem?

Steve Head: They are excellent for wildlife .

Judith Conroy: You have created a great habitat for ants :- ) There are about 50 UK species!

Lou: I **use shears** too - reassuring

Alison: I do the shears thing too and do it in stages so the grasshoppers etc don't suddenly find themselves homeless.

Chris Watt: Great talk Adrian, thank you. I can highly suggest your **book on Wildlife Gardening** as well !

Peter Almond: Excellent talk thanks - I have tried it myself and it works but can there be a **follow up on the full range of species** that might be used.

Steve Head: There's lots about meadows and species on our website [www.wlgf.org](http://www.wlgf.org)

Nigel Jennings: What do you do about **plants that are too vigorous?** Wild carrot grew thickly and very tall for me, shading other things out.

David Riddle: if individual clumps get too vigorous cut them down/mow early. They should regrow and flower but later. Mowing the meadow in patches creates variety

Angela Alexander: I spent a lot of time helping create a wildflower meadow but it was **flooded for over a week** last month. How will that have affected it other than the yellow rattle seed floating off!

Noreen Blanluet: Can you recommend any **good suppliers / companies to buy seed** mixes from please? I'm not knowledgeable enough to go collect seeds!

Andy: naturescapes up in North Notts are fab

Andy: and naturescapes grow on site, great website that will sell clay, woodland, wet etc

Steve Page: Naturescape have their own wild flower farm and sell all meadow mixes

Bryan Oak: Naturescape in Langar, Notts

Maggie Zebroski: Emorsgate seeds

David Riddle: I found Boston seeds very good

Pippa: Meadowmania a good brand

Steve Head: Suppliers - see [www.wlgf.org/plant\\_suppliers.html](http://www.wlgf.org/plant_suppliers.html)

Noreen Blanluet: Thanks for the pointers on choosing good suppliers

Judith Conroy: The Flora Locale code of practice covers UK sourced seed etc.

<https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FL-code-of-practice-growers-seeds.pdf>

Richard Godbehere: Big list of local provenance seed producers on Plantlife meadows hub

Andy: john little is really leading the way! a great way to keep substrates in site as you say Adrian.

Andy: re substates have a look Wild City Studio who are relocating their Chelsea garden to Tottenham.. amazing!

Helen Pedder: **Coronation meadows** are good to look for too

Charlotte.Stallard: Plantlife have just partnered with English Heritage to establish meadows at 100 historic sites

Judith Conroy: If you would like to find out about **our 2 further webinars** later this month, see our Eventbrite page - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/the-wildlife-gardening-forum-53738493573>

Judith Conroy: Here is the link to register for our **moths talk**, 'the pollinator night shift' on 26th February - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-pollinator-night-shift-helping-moths-in-our-towns-and-cities-tickets-776378337507>

Judith Conroy: Our webinar on Tues 13th Feb will look at '**pollinators and people**' and '**garden escapers**'. Register here - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pollinators-and-people-and-garden-escapers-tickets-776295620097>

Steve Head