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how to create a mini wild flower meadow

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SALE

Wild flower meadows at the Olympics

INSPIRE ME

When Britain hosted the Olympics in 2012, I heard almost as many people talking about the colourful meadows at the Olympic site as about Sir Chris Hoy and Mo Farah. The perennial wildflower meadows in Stratford were the work of James Hitchmough, professor of the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield. He designed 25 acres on the steep banks of the Lea Valley, using British native perennial wildflowers – long-season stalwarts such as spiny restharrow, betony, common toadflax and field scabious.



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The aim was to produce a meadow that would be as colourful as the very best examples you could find in nature. Everything was timed carefully so that it would all bloom at once, in a great exhilarating whoosh over the period of the Games. It went down magnificently.

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Can a wild flower meadow work in my garden?

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This style of “gardening” makes complete sense on an urban landscape scale. Gone are the days when local councils had the money to create expansive gardens with bought-in plants. It is much cheaper to grow from seed, and better still if areas can be direct-sown. Also gone are the public funds to keep up labour-intensive shrub and herbaceous beds, typical of our older parks, and the willingness to use gallons of water to keep them alive. That’s why native wildflower “meadows” and prairie gardens using exotic species are the way forward for urban landscapes.

This approach also makes sense on a smaller scale (think large garden or small field), and I expect many of us will be trying similar schemes in the next few years. If you’ve been inspired, learn how to recreate this look in your own garden with native British wild flowers ...

How to create your own mini wild flower meadow

seed choice

Make sure the seed mix you choose has the right ones relevant to your soil type.

If you’re combining flowers with grasses, or flowering up an area of existing grass, you need to reduce the strength of the grasses. It’s key to introduce [Yellow Rattle](#). This is a hemiparasite, which fixes its roots onto the root system of an adjacent grass and extracts the water and minerals it needs. This weakens the grass and hence the competition, allowing more delicate and often more colourful and interesting wild flowers to thrive.

The [Sarah Raven Wildflower Mix](#) contains a great mix of native British wild flowers, and includes Yellow Rattle, so provides a great start to your meadow.

ground preparation

Clear the ground.

If on a small scale, dig out the coarse-leaved grasses such as Cock's-foot, Couch Grass and Perennial Rye Grass. If on a large scale, consider spraying these off before you start. They out-compete the more delicate-growing wild flowers. Also make sure the area is as free of coarse-leaved grasses and robust-quick growing weeds such as thistles and docks before you sow.

Rotavate and then rake over to ensure a fine-ish tilth, and water if necessary.

sowing wild flower seeds

Direct sow your seed (at a seed density recommended by the seed supplier).

Most of these plants are [perennials](#) so will not flower well for a couple of years. I was impatient for flowers in my own mini meadow, so grew some wild flowers in trays in the autumn, pricking them out during the winter, to plant out as plugs when the soil had warmed up enough in April.

planting wild flower seedlings

Wild flower seedlings can be planted in enriched soil or an established grass area. Before planting the seedlings, mow the grass to less than 5cm and remove competition from any other long leaved grasses and flowers. Or remove the grass in a circle, using mechanical or chemical methods.

The planting hole should be the same shape and size as the seedling, i.e. an inverted pyramid. The planting hole can be quickly created with a suitably shaped dibber, but ensure that the surrounding soil is loose to allow the roots to spread easily. Keep watered until established if conditions are dry, and [protect from slugs](#).

meadow maintenance

Cut or strim the grass in August, or leave it until September if you want species such as Agrimony and Betony to get a hold.

Leave the hay where it falls for a week, turning it over a couple of times as it dries, to help the wild flower seeds drop back down into the soil.

Rake all the hay away so as not to increase fertility and use it for compost.

adding more varieties of wild flowers

Gather seed of the [wild flowers](#) you see and like in your local areas of grassland as well as lots of Yellow Rattle. You'll need permission from the land-owner. Gather the heads, or just knock the seeds into a brown envelope or paper bag. Leave them somewhere cool but airy to dry a little more before sowing.

Scarify a few patches through the area and scatter the seed. Yellow Rattle needs to be sown in the autumn.

autumn planning

You can still sow your wild flower seed now in late autumn. Some perennials need the winter cold to spark them to germinate. If you sow them now, those species will join the other perennials as well as spring-germinating [annuals](#) and [biennials](#), so everything should come up well.

Sow extra favourites – that you want lots of – into seed trays now for pricking out and planting out as soon as the soil warms up a little next spring.

For more Olympic wild flower inspiration, find out [how to sow your own exotic meadow ...](#)

Browse our range of [meadow seed mixes](#), or create your own mini meadow with our [wild flower seeds](#).

useful kit...



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