



SPECIFICATION FOR SEEDING PERENNIAL WILDFLOWER GRASSLAND

Wildflower meadows can be more expensive to establish but are much cheaper to maintain than close-mown grass. They are more visually attractive and their colours change with the season. They are of much greater value to insect and bird life than uniform grass. Normally they need to be cut only once or twice in late summer and once in spring, making the cost of establishment and maintenance cheaper than grass over a three-year period.

With suitable choice of species, wildflower meadows can produce a visually acceptable effect on difficult soils or subsoils more readily than pure grass. This is particularly valuable in re-vegetating brownfield sites and roadsides. However they require greater ecological knowledge in species selection and establishment than pure grass. Herbiseed can help with these issues, either with our 'Brief weed guides' or by providing assistance by e-mail, telephone or a site-visit.

Ready made wildflower seed mixtures to suit different situations are obtainable from Herbiseed (www.Herbiseed.com/wildflowers). These make it simple to sow large areas with a prepared mixture of suitable species. A more varied effect can be achieved by sowing a low maintenance grass mixture or basic wildflower mixture over the whole area, then hand broadcasting selected wildflower species on individual areas within it. This produces patches of different species in appropriate areas, for example tall species at the back, short species on banks, shade species under trees, spring flowers near paths etc. This method is particularly suited to small areas on topographically varied sites, and in public amenity areas.

Some don'ts:

- Do not sow into weedy ground. Weeds can seriously suppress wildflower establishment.
- Do not use a standard 'motorway mix' of grass seed. It is too vigorous, suppresses wildflower development and looks unkempt.
- Do not use ryegrass cultivars (*Lolium perenne*), which are too competitive and untidy.
- Do not use a high concentration of red fescue (*festuca rubra*) which can form a dense mat through which wildflowers may not emerge.
- Do not irrigate to force germination, but do irrigate to maintain growth if necessary after the majority of seedlings have emerged.

Method

Where it is necessary to import substrate, segregate different materials (sand, clay etc.) on to areas where their diversity can permit growing species with different soil requirements. On most sites, there is no need to import large quantities of topsoil (see Herbiseed Brief Wildflower Guide No 1). Smooth the substrate to contours which permit occasional mowing. Prevent any weeds which appear from seeding before the area is sown and eliminate any perennial weeds imported with the substrate by spraying with a suitable systemic herbicide. More details on the importance and methods of weed control are included in Herbiseed Brief Wildflower Guide No. 2.

HERBISEED BRIEF WILDFLOWER GUIDE No.3

Immediately before commencing final land preparation, spray any weeds present with a non-persistent herbicide such as glyphosate. Use a power harrow to produce a firm, moderate tilth. Do not use a rotavator, which tends to leave a fine seedbed liable to cap.

Either sow the prepared seed mixture over the whole area, or if separate patches of different species are desired, use the following method:

- 1) Sow a low maintenance grass mixture over the whole area. Ideally use a mixture of wild grasses such as Herbiseed's '**Park Meadow**' mixture. Wild grasses are less competitive than modern varieties of grasses bred for agriculture or amenity purposes which tend to suppress growth of the less competitive wildflowers. On chemically contaminated or extremely dry sites however, the wild red fescue variety 'Merlin' is recommended. Variety in growth habit and flower shape can be added by including additional slow growing grass species adapted to the site, or grasses with interesting seed heads. These can be sown in patches in the same way as the wildflowers.
- 2) Scatter the individual species of wildflower seed by hand in selected areas, ensuring, by raking if necessary, that the patches integrate with each other and do not have sharp boundaries.
- 3) Harrow lightly and roll the whole area with a ribbed roller.

Season of sowing

Best results are obtained with an early September sowing. Winter and spring sowings are usually successful, but sowing should be avoided between 31 April and 1 September in South and East England, where rainfall is less than in the North and West.

Species mixtures

The Herbiseed website has a range of ready-formulated wildflower mixtures to suit different soil types and different objectives, whether to encourage biodiversity or simply to have a wildflower area which is easy to maintain and pleasing to look at. However, if you need advice or a specially formulated mixture please contact us and our ecologist will be pleased to advise on how to meet your objectives.

Adding annual wildflowers

Perennial flowers often do not flower profusely in their first year. However, a good visual effect in the first year can be achieved by sowing a mixture of annual wildflowers (poppy, cornflower, corncockle and corn marigold) at 5kg per hectare at the same time as the perennials are sown. The annuals will flower in the first year without detriment to the long-term establishment of the perennial plants.

Further advice and seed can be obtained from:

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