

Wildflower mixes

Getting Started: Preparation

Preparation

- ⊗ Kill off any existing vegetation by spraying or by ploughing or digging it in (cutting it short first may help).
- ⊗ Prepare a fine seed bed - a smooth surface with the soil broken down as much as possible. For small areas breaking soil down with a fork or rake will do. For larger areas, rotovating with a garden rotovator. For 'agricultural' size areas, rotovating or power harrowing.
- ⊗ In engineering projects, house building or creation of ponds where soil is being moved and there is a choice of subsoil and topsoil available, a mixture of topsoil and subsoil (about 50:50) for a depth of about 30 cm overlying subsoil is usually ideal, provided the topsoil is not excessively weedy (especially with Docks and other perennial weeds). Subsoil alone can be used but if the structure is poor and the fertility very low there will be a very slow establishment of wildflowers and frequently domination by plants such as clovers which do not depend on nitrogen in the soil for their growth.
- ⊗ If large numbers of weeds are expected on a site, for example a site which has been very weedy over a couple of years, a 'stale seed bed' technique can be used before sowing, to reduce the number of weed seedlings. This involves preparing the soil for sowing and allowing the weed seeds to germinate and then killing them by rotovating or spraying, repeating the process once or twice more. This delays sowing but can be worthwhile in reducing weeds. In extreme situations it can be carried over more than one season. Sites which have had grass growing on them for a long time often have a relatively low number of weed seeds present in the soil

Sowing

Sowing rate: 2g per square metre:

i.e.: 50g for an area 5m by 5m

100g for an area 7m by 7m

Spring Sowing (Early March to June). You can sow as soon as it is possible to work the soil and the soil starts to warm up (later on wet soils). Late sowing after April is possible up to the end of June but there is an increasing risk in some areas of the country after May that seedlings will appear in very warm weather and the young plants will be vulnerable to drought. In other areas, the risk is quite small and, depending on weather conditions, sowing can be done throughout the summer. **OR**

Autumn sowing (Mid-August to October). This gives plants the advantage of an early start in spring. The disadvantage is that the site will look bare over winter with the possibility of soil erosion on some sites and any seedlings that unexpectedly appear may later be killed by frost.

How to Sow

The mixture should be sown on or very close to the soil surface. Mix the seed very well as some seeds are very small and dense and will separate from larger and less dense seeds.

- ⊗ **By hand:** Choose a calm day as seed can be blown away easily. Divide the site up into at least four equal areas. Divide up the seed into the same number of equally-sized lots. You can use some dry sand, sawdust or even barley meal or coarse porridge to bulk up the seed so that it is easier to spread and to see where it has been spread.

Use the first lot of seed on the first area to get used to sowing at the correct sowing rate. Seed can be spread by hand from a box or bag using a wide swinging action (to cover up to 2m width). Walk up and down in a regular pattern, remember that it can be difficult to see the seed on the ground so you may have to look at your footprints or use a marker. If you can, use half of the seed for each area sowing in one direction and then use the other half sowing at right angles. This helps to avoid leaving any empty patches.

SCOTIA SEEDS
Wildflowers of Scotland

scotiaseeds@btconnect.com

Mavisbank, Farnell, Brechin, Angus, DD9 6TR

☎ 01356 626425 📠 01356 629183

- ☉ **Mechanically:** broadcast by seed or fertilizer spreader. Cut the rate down to a very low level to start with and sow twice as above. A seed drill can be used but it must be set to allow the seed to be sown on or very close to the surface.

After Sowing

Roll the ground after sowing. For small areas, seed can be trampled in by foot or even driven over by a quad bike for example if a roller is not available – the purpose is to press the seed into the soil surface so that it makes better contact with the soil and will absorb water from the soil more effectively.

A very light raking or harrowing before rolling can help to settle the seed into the soil, especially for sowings late in the spring or if dry conditions are expected but the seed should not be buried.

Management after establishment

Cornfield Annual mix – this mix will provide a vivid show of colour in the early summer through to late summer in the year after planting if sown in autumn or in the same year of a spring sowing. Little management is needed, but as you will not be able to cut the area whilst the plants are growing it is advised to prepare a good clean seed bed before sowing to prevent unwanted annuals and other weeds from appearing!

This mix is a one year mix and will not keep flowering year after year. The species are typical of arable weeds that you would once find appearing in agricultural crops throughout Scotland – they appeared year after year because the ground was ploughed up every year and once the plants had established a good bank of seeds in the ground this provided ideal conditions to grow. If you would like repeat flowering the surest way is to plant more seed although it may be worth allowing your existing flowers to set and drop their seed and then in winter or early spring digging or rotovating the plants, including the seed heads back into the soil, and adding extra seed. Alternatively cut back and remove the plants once the seed has set and dropped and then rotovate and re-sow seed. This should allow a seed bank to build up and will disturb the ground, encouraging any seed present. You may eventually be able to rotovate the soil without adding seed.

Bee, Bird & Butterfly mix – although it includes annuals and biennials this is designed as a perennial mix that will reappear indefinitely. Although it could be cut back after flowering, leaving seed heads and dried stems provides a striking winter feature as well as food and shelter for wildlife, and new growth will come through in the spring.

Get Nectar-rich Quick Mix - this mix has a selection of annual, biennial and quick growing perennial wildflowers to provide a short-lived patch of wildflowers. After 2 years you can leave the perennials to develop or re-sow.

Beautiful Biennial Mix - this mix is a selection of tall biennials providing a short-lived (2-3 year) block of wildflowers - as they provide a spectacular winter display of stems and seed heads any cutting to tidy the area should be done in early spring.

Pond Edge mix - the species in this mix are designed to provide a vital environment around the edge of a pond and will also help to soften the look of a man-made water feature. Once planted you can leave these perennial plants to mature and develop with no management except for occasional weed control as necessary.

Things to avoid

- Adding fertilizer
- Sowing into existing vegetation

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