



Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) is an attractive and useful yellow-flowered annual meadow plant, from 8 to 30cm high. It is vital in developing and sustaining the variety of wildflowers in a meadow as it is a hemi-parasite that photosynthesizes for itself but which also parasitizes the roots of some plants, especially grasses. As it steals nutrients from the grasses, they grow much less vigorously and the grassy sward is opened up allowing other, less competitive meadow plants to grow. Yellow Rattle can also build up in areas and then fade away as its host grasses die out. The open patches are then available for colonization by wildflowers. Yellow Rattle is also a good food plant for many bumblebees.

There is a closely related species; Greater Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*), now rare in Scotland that is found in only a few coastal sites. It is also a hemi-parasite but more stately, growing from 10 to 60cm

Sowing: Yellow Rattle is effective when added to a meadow or grassy area by either sowing in a wide area, or in patches from where the plant will self seed, and plants will spread in future years. It should be sown in late autumn/early winter (late September – Dec) at a sowing rate of ½ to 1g per m².

First cut or graze the area to weaken the grass. This is important because if the grass is very vigorous – perhaps because the soil is highly fertile, the healthy grass plants can resist the attempts by Yellow Rattle to parasitize their roots.

Next harshly rake or rotovate to open up the grass sward and allow the Yellow Rattle seeds to make contact with the soil. Scatter the seed and roll or trample it in by foot.

It is also possible to sow Yellow Rattle with a meadow mix onto a bare site, as long as this is an autumn sowing in late September, early October. This is the latest time for an autumn-sown meadow mix and the earliest time to sow Yellow Rattle.

Management: Yellow Rattle germination occurs in spring and the plant produces attractive flowers and distinctive rattling seed heads in mid-summer. As the plant does not readily spread into healthy vigorous grassland and it needs some open soil to germinate, neighbouring areas managed for hay, silage or lawns are unlikely to be colonized by the plant. Cutting Yellow Rattle before it sets seed is also an effective way to control its spread if desired.

Please note that there are compounds in this plant that could be toxic to grazing animals if eaten in large amounts.



Yellow Rattle seedling