

Wild flower meadow or nature reserve

There is more to creating a wild flower meadow than just sowing wild flowers. Many species require more than one plant species to complete their life cycle. For example, the brimstone butterfly lays its eggs on buckthorn, a hedgerow shrub, but will use nectar found in the meadow. Dragonflies need a pond for breeding, but will hunt for insects in the meadow. So what are the additional features which will turn your meadow into something much more wildlife friendly and exciting?

Hedges

Insects, especially butterflies need shelter. They dislike being blown around. A boundary hedge of mixed species will be more than a wind barrier as it will provide nectar throughout the growing season. In addition, groups of shrubs can be planted in field corners or in groups to grow to full height and to provide berries for winter visitors such as field fares and redwings. These shrubs can be extended to provide a sheltered woodland walk round the meadow.

Hedgerow trees

Some of our most attractive trees are in fact small ones and will get shaded out if grown in a wood. Crab apple and wild pear have wonderful blossom (more nectar), and grow best in a hedge.

Mini-woodland

One of your field corners could be given over to a group of hazel, either 3x3 (9m²) or 4x4 (16m²), with the shrubs planted at 3m centres. In a few years you will have perfect shade conditions for primroses, violets, celandines wood anemones and much else.

A pond

In terms of attracting wildlife, a pond is arguably the most rewarding feature. Dragonflies will visit even before the pond has completely filled up. Use a butyl liner to create a 12mx12m pond with a margin planted up with key species. See **Further reading - Pond Management**.

Management. The spoil from the excavated pond can create a low bank which can be sown with fescue grasses to provide winter quarters for amphibians such as newts.

The rest of the meadow

If there are ditches, clean them out. If there is a wet area, deepen it. Anywhere you might be tempted to level or drain, do the opposite. Diversity is everything!

Uncut areas

Given some space, don't be tempted to cut everything every year. Leave several uncut margins of say 5m to help overwintering insects and small mammals, then rotate these every two years before scrub takes hold. This will all increase diversity.