

## Yellow rattle - essential wild flower ally

In the 1990's I was doing trials on my farm and yellow rattle was proving a key factor in reducing the competitive power of grass. After the introduction of yellow rattle in a 2 acre meadow a yield of 200 bales of hay reduced to 90.

### What is yellow rattle?

It is a semi parasitic plant which weakens grass growth, particularly coarse grasses such as cocksfoot, false oat grass and Yorkshire fog. These common grasses overwhelm wild flowers, particularly where areas have been left poorly managed or derelict. It does however have conditions attached:

-It is an annual, so it needs to flower and set seed every year or at least every other year, as the seeds only last 2-3 years in the soil.

-It has a wafer shaped seed, so it may require grazing/scarifying/harrowing in the autumn to help the seed make good contact with the soil surface so that it can come again.

The weakening of coarse grasses by yellow rattle also has the beneficial effect of encouraging the fine leaved grasses (bents and fescues) which are better companions to wild flowers.

### How to manage yellow rattle in a newly sown meadow

a) Light soils. With low grass growth on light soils (chalk and sand) it can be sown with a seed mix and whatever the management, it will come again.

b) Clay / fertile soils. In fertile grassland autumn management such as grazing or scarifying/harrowing is essential. Traditionally, hay meadows were grazed in late autumn and the feet of the grazing animal trod in the wafer shaped yellow rattle seed. Heavier seed rates of yellow rattle may be required on these soils. A few sheep for a week or two can be very helpful.

### Adding yellow rattle to existing grass/wild flower meadows

There will be many occasions where wildflowers are struggling in strong grass growth and the addition of yellow rattle can have a dramatic effect. If wild flowers are scarce in a sward, yellow rattle can be used to help additional species to establish, after which it can be grazed out if extra grass yield is required. Method: Mow the sward or strips short, rotavate to get 40% bare earth and the broadcast yellow rattle seed. Please contact for seed rate.

### Case Histories

1. 3 acres of strong grasses on Northants clay were cut for hay and then grazed in the autumn. Wild flower plugs had been introduced over the years without success. Yellow rattle was introduced one autumn with cattle in situ. The wild flower plugs all came to life, other species were added. It is now a stunning wild flower meadow.
2. 8 acres of parkland near Henley were dominated by false oat grass with wild flowers struggling to compete. Yellow rattle was introduced in 2m strips, false oat grass was greatly reduced and the wild flowers increased. This was much appreciated by local footpath users.