



## 6. CREATING WILDFLOWER GRASSLANDS IN THE WEALD

*Action for valued grasslands, for now and for the future*

### CREATING WILDFLOWER GRASSLANDS IN THE WEALD

Wildflower rich grasslands found on the south-east's Weald clay are an important habitat and an attractive feature of the landscape. The decline in the area (480 ha) covered by these special grasslands has become a serious threat to biodiversity. With this in mind, the Weald Meadows Initiative (WMI), the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and others have been active in encouraging both farmers and non-farming landowners to manage existing grasslands and to enhance and create new wildflower grasslands.

This information sheet provides information on the creation of species rich grasslands on the soils typical of the Weald. Other information sheets are available on soil sampling & the management and enhancement of such grasslands.

What type of soil is	THIN, POOR AND UN-FERTILIZED SOILS ARE BEST AS WILDFLOWERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE SWAMPED BY VIGOROUS WEEDS & GRASSES SUCH AS THISTLES AND DOCK.	Not sure? A soil test suitable? is always recommended. Contact WMI for advice on obtaining soil analysis (see soil testing sheet).
What's already there?	NO RARE OR SCARCE WEEDS OR GRASSES SHOULD BE PRESENT AS THESE WILL BE ERADICATED AS PART OF THE CREATION PROCESS	Not sure? Obtain advice from a specialist - contact WMI for information in the first instance
What's the drainage like?	SLOPES ARE USEFUL, AS IS A MIXTURE OF WET AND DRY AREAS TO ENCOURAGE DIFFERENT WILDFLOWER & GRASS SPECIES.	

### WHAT SPECIES OF WILDFLOWERS & GRASSES SHOULD I ENCOURAGE?

Avoid vigorous Rye grasses and use grasses as Bents, Sweet Vernal Grass, Fescues and Crested Dog's-tail and wildflowers such as Red Clover, Ox-eye Daisy and Knapweed. It is recommended that you use a mixture of species, which will exploit local soil variations. In addition, for smaller sites, you might like to consider a single speciality species such as Ragged Robin or Sneezewort in damper areas and other wildflowers.

### WHERE DO I LOCATE THE SEEDS?

Ideally, seed collected from traditionally managed meadows in the High Weald AONB should be used as these seed strains are better adapted to the local soils and conditions. Otherwise, you should check that the seed is at least of British origin if it is not local to the natural area. The exact mix of wildflower seed can depend upon whether a pasture or a hay meadow is required. For smaller sites of under 2 acres a proprietary seed mix of 20:80 flowers: grasses should be used.

All sites should be weed free prior to any wildflower & grass seed introduction.

## HOW MUCH SEED WILL I NEED?

The recommended rate of seeding using Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) is 15kg per hectare or 8kg/acre. A 100g packet of natural mixed seeds will be sufficient for an area up to 25 square metres.

If WNOS is not readily available or for larger sites another option is to use 16 kg of semi-commercial grass seed per hectare with 5kg per hectare of WNO wildflower seed.

## WHAT EQUIPMENT AND SKILLS DO I NEED?

You will need to source a variety of machinery/ animals depending on the scale and future management of your grassland. As a minimum you will require a plough or rotivator, power harrow or harrow/ rake, a hoe, mower/ topper and if using a weed killer, a sprayer, which can either be hand held or tractor mounted.

## HOW LONG IS IT GOING TO TAKE TO ESTABLISH?

Two years to establish, then an annual regime to manage the grasslands as a hay meadow or a grazing pasture. More information on enhancing existing grassland and managing your grassland is available in separate leaflets available from WMI.

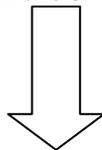
## HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Preparation is critical to the future success.

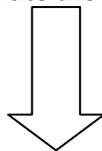
All crop and sward residues need to be removed, using chemical and mechanical methods, to create a stale seed-bed ready for the sowing of wildflower seed in the autumn. The use of a contact herbicide such as Glyphosate "Round Up") may be required if time is short or Couch grass, Dock or Creeping Thistle are present.

If only a few perennial weeds are present or organic control methods are preferred, it is possible to use mechanical methods only. This would require additional preparation in the Spring before sowing. Contact WMI for more information on this and on the use of herbicides.

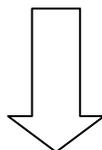
YEAR 1 LATE JUNE Remove residue of crops and/or perennial weeds using full-rate glyphosate herbicide, avoiding hedgerows and any drift. Allow four to six weeks for the sward and/or crop to die off.



YEAR 1 LATE JULY Plough or rotivate the soil.

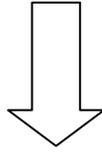


YEAR 1 LATE JULY/ AUGUST Cultivate to create a fine seed-bed using a power harrow, harrow/ rake and roll.



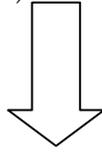
YEAR 1 AUGUST Allow any weed and any other residue seed to germinate.

YEAR 1 MID-LATE AUGUST Spray the re-growth with Glyphosate, only working the soil in optimum conditions (dry and warm) to prevent disturbing the seedbed.



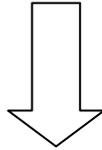
YEAR 1 SEPTEMBER

Look out for further weed seed germination and, if required, spray again in late September. A contact spray using 0.5-0.75 rate. Glyphosate can be used as a final weed seed kill a couple of weeks before sowing the wildflower seed. (At a 1/2 - 3/4 strength)



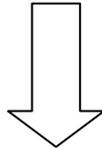
YEAR 1 LATE SEPTEMBER

A fine, clean weed-free seed-bed is ready for sowing.



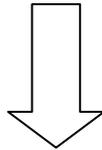
YEAR 1 AUTUMN

Surface broadcast the seed, rolling the soil after sowing (if dry).



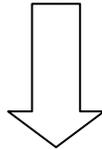
YEAR 1 SEPTEMBER TO  
YEAR 2 FEBRUARY

Keep the sward short by regular mowing & removal, or grazing to control the more vigorous grasses, flowers and annual weeds.



YEAR 2 MARCH

Ensure a regular management regime is followed according to whether a hay meadow or grazing pasture is required.



#### HAY MEADOW

In late July cut after most of the species have set seed and then graze the re-growth from September to November/December until the soil becomes too wet.

#### GRAZING PASTURE

Graze lightly in the spring and summer to allow wildflowers to set seed and have a main grazing season in late summer through to autumn/winter.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Having read through this information sheet, looked at your site, considered seed supply, checked what equipment and skills you will need and studied the suggested timetable and the tasks required, you may have other questions or need further advice before you can get started creating a wildflower grassland. WMI can help with information and advice and can point you towards other experts and seed suppliers. If you are a farmer considering creating a larger area of grassland, it would be advisable to speak to WMI or to an adviser at the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group who will be able to help and also refer you to related government agencies such as Natural England.

## **WEALD MEADOWS INITIATIVE**

The Weald Meadows Initiative (WMI) aims to enable the traditional management of unimproved meadows and the successful establishment of new species-rich grasslands in the High and Low Weald. Recognising the need for wildflower management and creation to be financially viable, it proactively develops and markets added value grassland products.

It is a public private partnership between the High Weald AONB Unit, Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd, the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and landowners and managers.

## **AGRIFACTORS**

Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd was incorporated in 1970 as an agricultural and horticultural merchant specialising in the supply of grass, clover, forage, fodder, vegetable and flower seeds to farmers, horticulturalists and amenity users in West Kent, East and West Sussex and Surrey. The knowledge built up since 1970, matching varieties and mixtures to soil type, location and specific climatic conditions within their trading area enable it to formulate and mix agricultural and amenity seeds to the users specific requirements. Its association with the High Weald AONB Unit, the Weald Meadows Initiative and FWAG since 1995 has developed into a worthwhile partnership enabling it to provide a seed source of known local provenance for Stewardship Schemes within the High Weald. Most of the people involved in the harvesting, drying, cleaning, mixing and despatch of this seed live locally, so that this activity supports the local community.

## **FWAG**

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group is a national group led locally by farmers and local organisations. It provides the farming community with a source of independent confidential advice on the management and improvement of existing wildlife and landscape features whilst integrating environmentally responsible, cost effective methods and techniques supported by sources of grant aid and practical assistance.

## **PLUG SUPPLIERS**

Mike Mullis - British Wildflowers 07932 683245 or [mm.wfp@tesco.net](mailto:mm.wfp@tesco.net)

## **HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

The High Weald AONB is a historic landscape of rolling hills draped with small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes. It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983 to aid its protection and management. It covers 563 square miles at the heart of South East England. Wildflower grasslands are a valued feature of the High Weald AONB.

Natural England is also an extended partner of the WMI and may be able to offer help and advice

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