

Establishing a Meadow



I really love the meadows in our garden. We have space for fairly big meadows but even in a smaller garden a smaller meadow can be beneficial to you and wildlife.

Establishing a meadow takes some effort and care and cutting it can be a bit tricky but it is well worth the effort. There is a lot of advice out there on how to do it, I will tell you how we did it successfully.

We started from a mown lawn about this time of year. Wildflowers need poor nutrient to thrive so it is wise to stop feeding the lawn before you start. Then you need to scarify (scrape) the grass hard so that there are large patches of bare earth as shown above. Some sources of advice say to dig over the ground but this just encourages plants like nettles which love disturbed ground. Meadow seed is widely available on line quite cheaply. Make sure you get a mixture of annuals and perennials which includes Yellow Rattle. This is parasitic on grass and weakens it so that the wild flowers can compete. As it is an annual you can mow it off from other parts of the lawn which will not be



affected. Scatter the seed and work it in to the soil lightly then tread it in hard. This is important for Yellow Rattle which can be reluctant to establish. You can mow the grass until plants start to appear then stop.

In the first year the annuals will flower while the perennials will not flower until the second year. The annuals may flower in the second year but later on the perennials will take over as the annuals need disturbed ground and the meadow is left undisturbed once established. It is possible to buy plug plants of meadow flowers but these are a lot more expensive. The advantage is that they have more chance of establishing. I have added plants to the meadow as plug plants which has worked well.



Our meadow starts with Cowslips in the spring and continues with summer flowers as shown. As the summer progresses the meadow dies back and needs cutting, usually in September. We experimented with different methods and found the easiest to be with a scythe. The photo at the bottom shows my husband scything the meadow. He watched U tube videos to learn how to do it and is now pretty good. A smaller meadow could be cut with more conventional tools. We leave the cuttings to lie for a week or so to let the seed drop. We tried composting the cuttings but they are very dry and need mixing thoroughly with damper material. We have now invested in a brown bin for the cuttings.



You may be thinking that all this sounds like a lot of work or you do not have much space and it would not be for you. If this is the case you could still have wild flowers in the garden either in a nectar bar or in amongst other plants. The wild flowers provide food plants for moth and butterfly caterpillars as well as nectar and

pollen. A patch, or edges, of long grass which is not cut are also beneficial as they provide a habitat in winter when the meadow is cut. If you decide to do any of this you will be helping wildlife. Those of you who are Gardeners World fans will no doubt have seen the recent episode about Wildlife Gardening. If you have not seen it you can still get it on I player. Enjoy!

