

How to establish wild flowers

Wildflowers make a great addition to any large garden.

Establishing a wildflower meadow can be difficult. Wildflowers thrive on poor quality soils, rather than rich, fertile soils. The reasoning behind this is that grasses and weeds can easily out-compete wildflowers. Grasses and weeds will grow very well on fertile soils, so wildflowers stand little chance of survival when competing with these.

When to Sow

Sowing wildflowers can either be done in the Autumn (Aug-Oct) or the Spring (Feb-May). Most people tend to favour sowing in the Autumn, because there is less competition with weeds.

Ground Preparation

Before you start to prepare your wildflower seed bed, you need to kill off any grasses, weeds or plants in the area first. Do this by either spraying, or lifting the turf, with the latter of course involving more physical work. Typically this work is best done a few months before you intend to sow.

Once you have cleared the area, you need to break up the soil. Do this with either a fork, petrol tiller, or if you are doing a larger area, a contractor in your local area.

Sowing

Sowing wildflowers is very different to sowing lawn seed. To put it into context, you use 28 times more lawn seed than wildflower seed. The sowing rate for wildflowers is 2.5g/m². Spreading seed at such a low rate can be difficult. People find mixing the seed with coarse builders sand can help spread seed more evenly. Over small patches, this doesn't tend to be so much of a problem. Use a spreader, or spread by hand. Once the seed is spread, gently rake the soil, and compact it with or roller, or by treading in.

Establishing

Once you've sown your seed, it should begin to germinate within a few weeks. The flowers and the grasses will all come through at different times, so don't worry if the grasses emerge first. If you've chosen an annuals or annuals and perennials mix, then you should see colour in the first year. With a perennials mix, then you may see some flowers establish the first year, but they will be much better the second year.

Maintainance

All you need to do in order to keep your flower meadow healthy, is to strim the area once a year, after the wildflowers have flowered. Usually this is September-October time. You need to remove all the debris, and tidy the area up with a rotary mower, cutting it down to a few inches.