

Good practice for managing flower-rich grassland

What's so good about flower-rich grassland?

Traditionally managed flower-rich grasslands are a rich resource for our wildlife - from birds and butterflies to rare plants - many of the special species of the Peak District can find food and a home here.



Why do I need to manage my grassland?

Nationally, the number of flower-rich meadows have plummeted, mainly due to changes in how the land is managed. There is a clear link with the loss of our native wildflowers, declines in pollinating insects and other farmland wildlife such as curlew and skylark.

To conserve the wealth of different wildlife found in a flower-rich grassland, it is essential to manage them so

- ◆ The plants can flower and set seed
- ◆ Ground nesting birds and small mammals can finish raising their young
- ◆ Invertebrates can go through their whole life cycle.



What do I need to do?

Ploughing, re-seeding and applying artificial fertilisers and pesticides are always damaging to flower-rich grasslands.

Whilst maintaining existing drains may be important, creating new drains will change the character of the grassland.

Care needs to be taken when managing weeds or controlling scrub.

The **Countryside Stewardship Scheme** is designed to support farmers and landowners interested in managing land for a range of positive environmental outcomes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management>

If you have a hay meadow, you need to

- ◆ Remove grazing animals by the middle to end of May. If earlier flowering plants such as cowslips are present, remove grazing animals by the end of February.
- ◆ Cut the grass after 1st July (ideally after 15th July) to allow early flowering plants such as hay rattle, ox-eye daisy and clover to set seed. If you leave margins and corners, later flowering plants such as knapweed can carry on flowering and set seed. At least one year in five, cut the whole field after the middle of August.
- ◆ Do not cut completely around the outside first to allow small mammals to escape.
- ◆ Wilt the hay in the field for at least 48 hours and turn at least once before baling.
- ◆ Graze after cutting to keep autumn grass growth down.



If you have pasture, you might consider

- ◆ Removing grazing animals for four to six week periods throughout the growing season or grazing continuously with low numbers of stock to allow flowering and setting seed.
- ◆ Grazing before the end of winter to remove the years grass growth and let smaller, more fragile flowers survive.
- ◆ *Foggage* or *feg* - grazing only in autumn and/ or early spring to allow flowering and stop dead plant material sitting over winter.
- ◆ Cattle will graze rougher grasses and create a better tussocky sward. Areas with both long and short sward, and tussocks gives the most habitats for wildlife.
- ◆ Creating small bare patches to provide places where invertebrates can thrive and seeds can germinate.
- ◆ Letting as many as 60% of plants to flower and set seed.

