

# HOW TO...

## incorporate a WILDFLOWER GARDEN

There is an ever-increasing demand for wildflowers within the garden not only for their natural beauty but protecting our ecosystems into the future. We spoke to three professionals to aid your consideration for creating a biodiverse habitat, however large or small

The majority of garden designers are well educated in wildflower meadows and will encourage a space of the garden (of any size or shape) to be dedicated to providing birds, bees and other minibeasts with food and pollen. There are several ways of incorporating wildflowers and it's a good idea to think of the results you want to achieve before discussing it with your designer.

James Hewetson-Brown of Wildflower Turf says: "I think the most important things with establishing a wildflower meadow is to research what a wildflower meadow is and what you should expect by establishing one. Also, you will need to accept it for what it is – a wild space that is unpredictable and ever-changing with the seasons and from year to year. But at the same time, realise what you have done – see it as an act of charity

towards nature! You are positively contributing to biodiversity, wildlife and the planet. That may sound a little idealistic or even trite, but a patch of wilderness in a garden is a positive contribution to society that has been phased out in the last 50 to 100 years and it would be wonderful to phase it back in – quickly!"

**1 Annual or perennial**  
There are different results from each type of wildflower – annuals will need more input but can provide a stunning show of brightly coloured flowers from early summer to late autumn, and perennial native meadows where you may not get every colour under the sun but the effects are longer-lasting without the need to reseed every year.

Annuals are generally non-native and demand a lot more work as they need reinstating every year to ensure good results. But if you want horticultural bling then annuals offer that in spades. In the longer term, annual areas can get very weedy and need careful management.

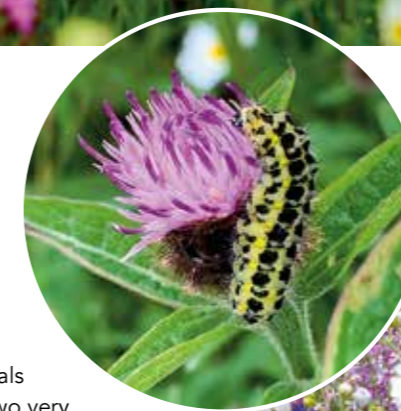
Stuart Ball from John Chambers Wildflowers says: "Annual wildflower mixes are great to grow in the garden as they're a one-year wonder and are also low maintenance – they germinate, flower and seed all in one year. After seeding, remove the spent plants (these can go into compost) and rake over

**'You will need to accept it for what it is – a wild space that is unpredictable and ever-changing...'**

again. You can either allow the seeds produced to germinate and see how the display looks the following year, or even better, buy a new mix every year and change it up. Annual mixes are normally easy to establish on most soil types and often include old favourites such as poppies and cornflowers."

"Native perennials are much more subtle in their appearance but once established will remain forever if maintained by cutting and removing once or twice a year", ensures James Hewetson-Brown. "These are really the only true wildflower meadow. They have an inherent beauty because of their

**Left:** Annual mixes often include poppies and cornflowers



**Clockwise from above:** Oxeye daisies are a typical perennial wildflower, with a long flowering period from May to September; you can build a favourite colour scheme into your meadow; caterpillars and other wildlife enjoy feasting on common knapweed

subtlety and the relative scarcity of the flowers that are in them. They are wild and natural and every year many factors will feed into their look, making them unpredictable, which is all part of their charm!

Both annual and perennials are lovely, but they are two very different things, so for the benefit of both, this is an important thing to understand when choosing."

"Perennial 100% wildflower mixes offer an alternative perennial bedding option and once established, just need to be cut back after they've seeded in early-autumn, ready to spring back into life the following year; they're also very low maintenance", says Stuart. However, he warns: "The first year they're established can seem lacking in colour and amount of flowers but



PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN CHAMBERS WILDFLOWERS/WILDFLOWER TURF/ADAM VETTERE





**REMEMBER**  
A patch of wilderness in a garden is a positive contribution to society. Ask experts to find out the most beneficial way to add wildflowers to your space

‘Any diverse wildflower area will be of benefit to the local environment, whether it’s in a small urban yard, or a larger area of meadow’



perennials could take over and thrive, so you will need to thin these out should it happen.”

**4 Maintenance regime**

So although wildflower (however large or small) is not completely maintenance free, if you need any further encouragement to consider a wildflower garden, James says: “Just try it – put a wildflower space in your garden, even just a square metre, and watch it for five minutes on a summer’s day and it is incredible the amount of life you will see. Just doing that is great for your mind and soul and you will be

reassured of what a significant charitable donation you have made to the world.” And Stuart adds: “Any diverse wildflower area will be of benefit to the local environment, whether it’s in a small urban yard, or a larger area of meadow, and will attract pollinators of all types including bees, birds and butterflies by day, but also moths and bats by night. Everybody can play their part by sowing some wildflower seeds, either in pots, a flower bed or as part of a larger landscaping project. **DG**

- [Wildflowerturf.co.uk](http://Wildflowerturf.co.uk)
- [Johnchamberswildflowers.co.uk](http://Johnchamberswildflowers.co.uk)
- [Adamvetere.co.uk](http://Adamvetere.co.uk)



this is normal; blooms will increase and improve from year two onwards, so long as the plants are cut back in autumn.”

**2 Methods of creating a wildflower garden**

There are two main ways to create a wildflower garden and your designer will choose the best for you. There are benefits and drawbacks of both.

**Sowing from a ready mixed seed** – specialist wildflower companies such as John Chambers Wildflower will be able to create a bespoke mix which will work alongside the type of soil in your garden. The disadvantage of sowing from seed is having to wait for it to establish – this requires patience!

**Clockwise from left:** The open flowerheads of Oxeye daisies attract lots of pollinating insects, especially bees; mown paths highlight and navigate you through a wildflower meadow (gardens by Jenny Carter and Elks-Smith Garden Design)

**Laying wildflower turf** – for quick and reliable results turf is an excellent option, which has an almost 100% success rate, as long as the ground is prepared properly and the turf is not allowed to dry out until established (two to four weeks). The downside of turf is it may be more expensive and the mix more limited, but if you want quick results this is a solution, and specialist company Wildflower Turf is happy to advise.

**3 Common species used**

“John Chambers Wildflower has mixes for different soil types, including clay, sandy and alkaline. Mixes are tailored with species to suit the soil type,” says Stuart, “so you can expect to see Oxeye daisies, Purple Loosestrife, Selfheal, clovers and many other species, depending on the mix you choose.”

James says: “Common species used in Wildflower Turf are ragged robin, pink and white champions, birds foot

trefoil, common knapweed, vetches, the list is long and there is no need to be prescriptive with species, but create a mix and see what proliferates in your garden or wildflower space. This is the mindset you should have when creating a wildflower meadow.”

Garden designer Adam Vetere believes that to start with the key to a successful meadow is to get the ground conditions right. In an ideal situation, the topsoil will be stripped back and a low fertility substitute (low in phosphorous) will be used as the base for the meadow. He advises: “Always ask your designer or landscaper to add in late winter and early spring bulbs to extend the flowering period.”

He continues: “Normally the biggest issue with a meadow is the dominance of grass – this can be countered by bringing in Yellow Rattle or using the ‘late Chelsea chop’ method. It’s not just grass which can dominate, as depending on the local conditions one of the

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN CHAMBERS WILDFLOWERS/WILDFLOWER TURF/ADAM VETERE

**GUIDE TO MAINTENANCE REGIME**

**Be aware that a wildflower garden is not maintenance free, it will need some attention from time to time. To give you a guide this should be the regime:**

- CUT 1** A late winter cut, if the weather has been mild and wet, usually in late February/March. All clippings to be removed.
- CUT 2** An effective ‘Chelsea chop’ in late May/early June, especially if the grasses are beginning to take over. Cut to a height of 15cm, this will allow the perennials to thicken out again and push the grasses back.
- CUT 3** The ‘drought cut’. Needed in early to mid-summer if the spring and early summer have been hot and dry. This will allow the meadow to come again and possibly flower in late autumn. Cut to 5cm and remove the clippings.
- CUT 4** The ‘autumn cut’. The final cut of the year after the seeds have been dispersed. Cut back to 5cm and remove the clippings.