

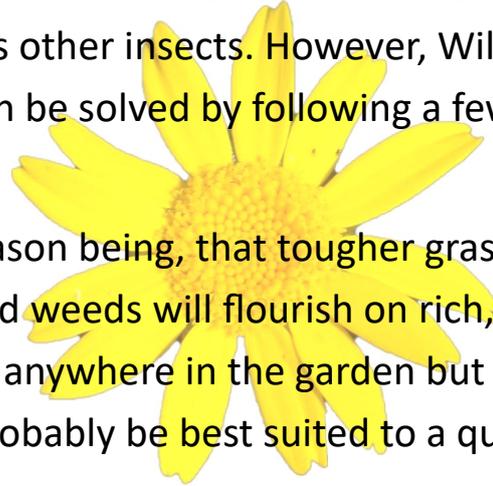
Wildflowers in the garden

Wildflowers can be a beautiful and eye-catching addition to any garden. They are incredibly important to native British wildlife and are a valued source of nectar for many garden birds, bees, butterflies and various other insects. However, Wildflowers can be difficult to establish, but the problem can be solved by following a few easy steps.

Wildflowers thrive on poor quality soils. The reason being, that tougher grasses and weeds will easily out compete them, grasses and weeds will flourish on rich, fertile soil. You could create a wildflower area pretty much anywhere in the garden but to encourage wildlife into your garden, it would probably be best suited to a quiet corner with little disturbance.

Wildflowers can be sown either in the Spring (Feb-May) or Autumn (Aug-Oct). The Autumn is generally favoured as there tends to be less weed competition at this time of year. Some species of wildflowers need a period of 'vernalisation' which means, in simple terms, that the seed needs a wintery cold snap to germinate.

You need to prepare the ground for sowing wildflowers by killing off weeds and grasses, either by spraying or removing the turf to expose bare soil. Then break up the surface with a fork or a tiller. Be sure to put in the hard work here, as it will pay off later on!



Wildflowers in the garden

Sowing wildflower seed is very different to sowing grass seed. To put this into perspective, you need around 28 times more grass seed than wildflower seed.

Wildflower sowing rate is 2.5g/m². The problem now arises that such a small amount of seed is difficult to spread evenly.... A solution to this is to mix the seed with coarse builders sand and then to spread either by hand or using a spreader. Another solution is to have the wildflower seed incorporated into a grass mixture (Usually 80/20 or 90/10 in favour of grasses.) After the seed is down, rake in gently and compact down with a roller or by treading it in. Mixtures can be tailored to suit various soil types, (eg. Clay soils, marshy wet ground, sandy soils, etc) or just general purpose.

Germination should occur within a few weeks. Don't worry if grasses emerge first, they are tougher and stronger after all!

Mixtures containing annuals should bring colour to the garden in the first year, but perennial mixtures will show different species in the second and third years. Not all species will show in the first year and so, the area will be a constantly evolving project holding gardeners interest year after year. Some species are biennial, which produce foliage in the first year and flower in subsequent years.

To maintain the flower area, strim once a year after flowering (usually Sept-Oct) and clear all cut stems and debris. Tidy with a mower on a relatively high cut. The wildflowers will re-sprout again the following year, producing a wonderful display of fresh blooms and foliage to enjoy.

