

HOW TO GET A WILDFLOWER MEADOW!



Wildflower meadows are **environmentally friendly**, because they offer a home to many bees, butterflies and other insects and are **easy to maintain** (no watering or fertilizing and rarely mowed).

Use **seeds from domestic plants**. Bees and other pollinators are adapted to our domestic plants and won't find enough food on flowers, which come from other parts of the world. Also, some alien species can be invasive and somehow steal habitats from local plants. Therefore, be sceptic when buying commercially available seeds for wildflower meadows - although they are nice and colorful, they often add no value to our local biodiversity!

Almost every site is suitable for a wildflower meadow, but it follows the principle: the sunnier, drier and leaner the location, the higher the diversity of species. The lack of water and nutrients gives the wildflowers a competitive advantage against most grasses. The flower seed mixture should be selected according to the soil conditions. Only on a very shady place it is hardly possible to obtain a flower meadow.

Before the sowing, **the soil must be prepared and be free of any vegetation**. Do not cultivate the soil deeper than 3cm at least one month before sowing. The reason is that weed seeds that are still present in the soil begin to germinate as soon as they are brought up from the depths to the light on the surface.

It is best to sow **right before rainy weather**. You can sow in spring (March / April) or autumn (September) The autumn sowing offers advantages for some species that need cold temperatures to germinate. Split the seed mixture in two and sow the seeds in both directions on the prepared soil, but do not cover it soil, nor dig it in. It's important to **pressure the seeds to the ground** (with wooden boards for example), so that they touch the soil to be able to germinate easily. Only in very exposed locations, it can be recommended to cover the freshly sowed area very slightly with long cut grass or hay in a way that still enough sunlight can cut through to the germinated plants. At very poor soil a thin **compost layer** of 1-2cm can be applied prior to seeding and superficially be dugged in. After the initial pressuring, the soil can slightly be watered once. But be careful with the watering in order not to wash away the seeds. After that **do not water your wildflower meadow anymore, not even in times of a long drought**.

After that, **patience is the key word! Don't expect too much of your wildflower meadow in the beginning**. Some seeds germinate only after they went through the cold of the winter. Some species are perennials that first grow some leaves in the first year with very few flowers. **It may take up to three years until your wildflower meadow looks good**.

The fastest wild herbs need 4 to 8 weeks to germinate. The spontaneously germinating weeds whose seeds are still present in the soil, grow already after 2 to 3 weeks. **That's not a problem, but once the weeds reach knee-height and prevent the light from reaching the ground, it's time to mow**. Cut at maximum height and remove the cut weeds from the area. Repeat the procedure after a few weeks if necessary. Some weeds, like thistle, sorrel, dandelion have to be removed manually with the whole root and before seed formation. Also keep in mind that not all the species in the seeded mixture will appear, since only the plants that are best adapted to the location will permanently remain there.



The **first regular cut** is done after flowering of grasses (**end of June** to mid-July). Do not cut with a regular rotary mower, but with a bar-mower or sickle-mower or with a good old hand-scythe. **The cut material is left on the surface to dry up to one week** (depending on the weather). When turning, the seeds fall out. Then the cuttings are discharged. The following month of July is usually quite rainy, so that the next bloom phase can begin. Very effective, but rarely used because very labor-intensive, is the partial mowing: mow only a third to half of the area and the next part a little later. This allows thousands of beetles, caterpillars and other small animals to save themselves in the newly growing part.

A **second regular cut** takes place in **October / November**. Here, the exact time is not as important as the weather: it must be dry for a week so that the cut grass dries as in June and can drop its seeds. The clippings are discharged afterwards just as in June. The period for the second cut can be postponed to the winter, if the yellow and gray appearing does not optically disturb you. The remaining plants offer food and cover for birds during the cold season.

Thus be prepared to the fact that in the first year, your wildflower meadow might not yet match your common expectations. But don't worry, this will change!