



A mini-meadow in your garden

A mini-meadow in your garden will provide a damp environment for hunting frogs, some delicate grasses for specialist butterflies to lay their eggs on, and a home for grasshoppers and crickets. A larger meadow might give you a home for moles and could attract goldfinches. Old meadows and pasture land are a wonderful part of our countryside. Fragile habitats where grasses and wildflowers grow, rare butterflies breed, and small mammals forage. While many animals now depend on these meadows, they are a man-made environment. Centuries of grazing and cropping hay have led to an extremely poor soil, which does not become woodland because of ongoing grazing.

Meadows in London

If you want to look for butterflies and shrews in a meadow near London, visit in July, and try one of these nature reserves:

Saltbox Hill – Croydon, managed by the London Wildlife Trust, phone 020 7261 0447 for details

Frays Farm Meadows – Hillingdon, managed by the London Wildlife Trust, phone 020 7261 0447 for details

Meadows Locally

Islington has a number of parks which now have pictorial, long grass and wildflower meadows such as Gillespie Park Local Nature Reserve, Highbury Fields and Whittington Park, for more information contact 020 7527 4953.

Making your mini-meadow

Ideal time to start: September–October

Good time to start: February – March

Stick a spade in the ground to test the soil type and check the level of sunshine, then turn the page for your meadow choices.

Mark out and measure the area, if other people mow the garden you may need to define the edge with a low fence or wooden edging. Decide which of the following methods is more appropriate for you.

Spring and summer meadows based on wild grasses, especially those grown from seed will establish stronger roots and a thicker sward if mown during all of the first year. Any unwanted docks, nettles or other unwanted plants can be removed with a trowel in spring or autumn.

Planting plugs or pots into a lawn

Place your wildflowers in random patterns in your meadow patch. Use a trowel to cut a pot-sized hole into the turf for each wildflower, then plant directly into these holes. To plant bulbs, lift a square of turf, then use a bulb-planter to place singly, at about twice their own depth, pointy end up. Replace the turf. If you want to use seed as well, you should cut lines into the turf first, it will not germinate if sprinkled on top.

Growing from plugs is a little quicker and more reliable, works well in existing turf, but costs more. You will need between 3 – 15 plants per metre, Use less for a two-year meadow which produces larger plants.

Growing from a seed mix in bare ground

Weed the area, and dig it over then rake to a fine tilth, rake and firm it with boards or a roller. Mix your seed mix really well, then add about three times the volume of fine sand to help you spread it properly. Sprinkle the mix through your fingertips walking back and forth and crossways across your mini-meadow. Water the seed in with a hose on a fine sprinkler, or firm it carefully with a small board. Cover the patch with a square of chicken wire to keep cats off.

Meadow seed mixes are now available from a number of suppliers, and are a cheap way of establishing a mini-meadow. Cornfields grow quickly from seed.

The table below gives a selection of meadows to try and when to start them

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Spring Meadow - Low fertility soil											
In a sunny spot – Cowslip, salad burnet, self heal, daffodil, grape hyacinth, crocus If damp – try snakeshead fritillary, cuckoo flower, ragged robin, fine grasses eg. Sweet vernal grass											
Summer Meadow - Low fertility, free draining soil											
In a sunny spot – Ox-eye daisy, field scabious, devils-bit scabious, knapweed, agrimony, lady's bedstraw, tufted vetch, meadow buttercup, fine grasses eg. Crested dogstail, timothy											
Two year Meadow - Medium fertility soil											
In a sunny spot – Teasel, cow parsley, wild carrot, chicory, evening primrose, goldenrod, Michaelmas daisy, Tough grasses eg. Cocksfoot, tall fescue											
Daisy lawn - Medium fertility soil											
In a sunny spot – Daisy, creeping buttercup, red and whiteclover, birdsfoot trefoil, black medick, lawn grasses eg. Fescue, perennial rye grass											
Woodland Glade - Medium fertility soil											
Damp shade – Primrose, bugle, foxglove, hedge bedstraw, wood avens, bluebell, snowdrop, shade-tolerant grasses and sedges eg. Reed sweet grass, wood sedge											
Cornfield - Medium-high fertility soil											
Corn poppy, corncockle, corn marigold, cornflower, pheasants eye, borage, cereals – wheat, rye, oats											

Make hay while the sun shines:



Cut = Using shears, a strimmer, or a good lawnmower cut the entire area down. Leave the cuttings where they are for a few days to allow seed to fall.



Mow = Monthly mowing, or grazing, will keep the grass manageable and encourage the roots to develop well. Mow at the highest setting on your mower.



Cut and Hoe = Annuals need soil that is disturbed every year, if you are working in a very small patch, you might prefer to harvest the seed, then put it directly back into the ground yourself.



Trim = Woodland grasses and plants will only need a light trim and weed

Remember when you are cutting your meadow or daisy lawn to rescue any frogs first!

Ideas to reduce soil fertility

- Strip the turf
- Strip the topsoil
- Grow a potato crop
- Grow a green manure like buckwheat
- Add gravel or sandy soil then add it to the compost heap

Meadows take time to establish – choose a cornfield mix if instant effect is important to you.



In partnership with



Nature Conservation Team.
Islington Ecology Centre,
191 Drayton Park,
Gillespie Park local
Nature Reserve,
London N5 1PH

T 020 7354 5162

F 020 7288 1717

E ecologycentre@islington.gov.uk

W www.islington.gov.uk