

## What do you mean by wildflowers?

Many groups now want to have 'wildflowers' often as a 'meadow'. It is helpful to understand what these terms mean, as they are often used indiscriminately which can lead to disappointing results. Many local authorities now brighten roadside verges and roundabouts with flowers that are not really Scottish wildflowers but an annual seed mix which has some native species like cornflowers but also Californian poppies and cosmos which give a longer flowering season. If it is only Scottish native species in the mix, it can be called cornfield annuals i.e. red poppies, blue cornflowers, yellow corn marigolds, and white oxeyes which thrive in disturbed ground after cultivation. For these to work, you really need to cultivate the ground and sow fresh seed each spring. Leaving the plants to set seed tends to give less attractive results in later years, as not all species produce enough seed, while vigorous but less desirable species such as docks and thistles colonise the ground. Docks and thistles do have wildlife value; goldfinches, for example, love thistle seeds, but you may prefer to accommodate these weeds in less prominent areas in your community. One answer to this problem is to move the bed every few years, which works in a park or a wide verge but not on a roundabout. One of the first to do this was a lecturer at Sheffield University who called the idea 'Pictorial Meadows', and went on to sow big areas for the London Olympics. The [website](#) has more info and some nice pictures. However, the name 'meadows' is confusing, as a meadow is an area of permanent grass traditionally used for hay or grazing animals with perennial wildflowers in it, not annuals.

There are perennial seed mixes which aim to create something more like a meadow - some include some grass species - but what you will end up with will depend on what sort of soil you have. You usually cut these once a year in autumn. Or you can leave some existing grass to grow, and again just cut in autumn - be sure to uplift the cut material to reduce soil fertility and encourage more diverse wildflowers. At first you will mainly get coarse grass. You can sow yellow rattle to reduce the vigour of the grasses. You need to expose some bare soil for it to germinate. You can buy wildflower plug plants to add to your grass, but it's fun to see what comes up naturally as you change your management. No Mow May is popular, but to mimic a traditional hay meadow, take one cut a bit later in June/July, then a second in autumn. If you have ground nesting birds like skylarks, early summer cutting risks destroying nests. Another way to create a meadow is to buy in turf with wildflower plugs incorporated, but this is expensive so only practical for small areas. Remember, you need some short grass for people to walk on and children to play.

Have a look at websites such as [Scotia Seeds](#), [Landlife Wildflowers](#), [Pictorial Meadows](#), also traditional seed merchants like [Suttons](#), and [Thompson & Morgan](#).