

HOW TO ESTABLISH A PERENNIAL MEADOW FROM SEED

Sowing times and conditions:

Unlike annual seed, perennial meadow seed can be successfully sown at any time of the year as long as the ground is workable and you are prepared to irrigate. The optimum time though seems to be early winter as the cold period encourages more seedlings to germinate in the very first spring.

Most of the perennial PM mixes will do well if sown in full sun and free draining soils, with the exceptions of **Woodland Edge** and **Water's Edge**, which will cope with semi-shade and waterlogged conditions respectively.

Ground Preparation:

Regardless of scale the basic procedures are the same. You need to get a very clean, weed free seed bed. In particular you need to make sure you have removed all the perennial weeds and any grass. Selective herbicide treatment might be necessary for larger areas. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when handling a herbicide.



Using a Sterile Mulch:

For most mixes it makes a substantial difference to the long term meadow success if you sow the seed onto a sterile mulch which has been spread evenly over the prepared seed bed to an average depth of around 75 mm just before sowing. We commonly use locally sourced PASS 100 green waste compost for this as it tends to be cheap and readily available. The function of the mulch is to suppress the germination of the thousands of annual seeds that will be in the soil bank.



When most of the weeds are either controlled or removed, spread the mulch evenly across the seed bed with a rake. Make sure that the existing topsoil gets fully covered by the mulch and that it is not brought to surface by raking too deeply

Sowing:

The seed needs to be sown evenly across the clean soil/mulch at a rate of 2 g per square metre.

Instructions for perennial seed sowing is exactly the same as annual sowing. Seed is best mixed with a bulking agent such as slightly moist sharp sand to help you distribute it evenly over the area. Novice sowers should aim for a ratio of roughly 1:8 seed to bulking agent, more experienced sowers can reduce this to as low as 1:3.

To start with put all the bulking agent into a large bucket and then add all the seed. Mix the two together very thoroughly.

Then transfer a third of the mixed seed and bulking agent to a smaller bucket. You then need to walk up and down across the prepared bed scattering this material evenly over the whole area. The mixing agent allows you to see where you have sown. If you have any leftovers scatter this in any areas that look like they may have been missed

Next transfer the second 1/3 of the mix into the small bucket. This time focus on sowing across any areas that look as if they might not have received much seed in the first place and pay special attention to the edges

Finally use the last 1/3 to cover the whole area all over again but this time walking in the opposite direction to the first spreading.

Rolling or Firming:

Rolling or firming the freshly sown seed in is necessary when sowing in the spring and when sowing directly onto the soil. When a mulch is used or when one sows in either early autumn or early winter, it is best not to roll at all.

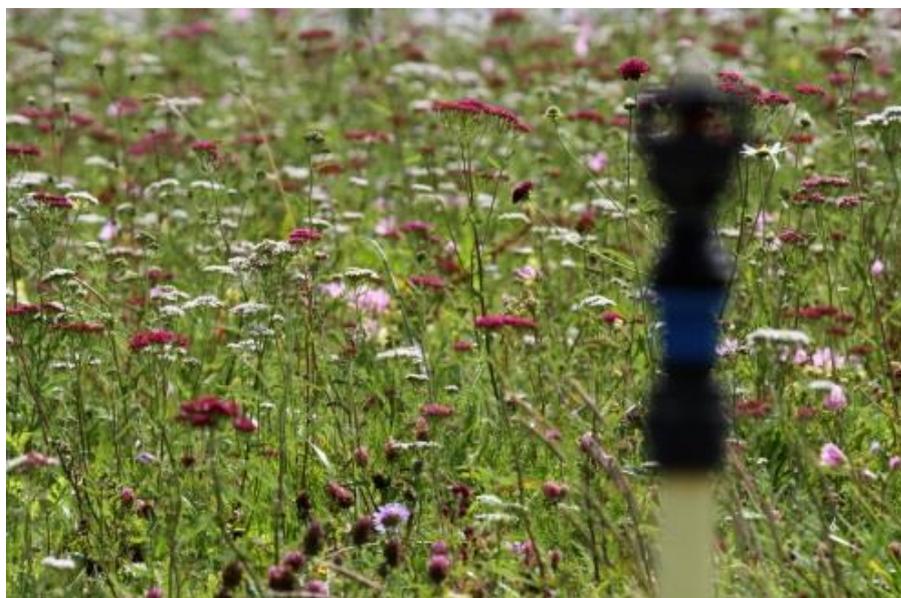
Germination

Germination will only take place when there is sufficient moisture and warmth in the soil. Germination is much slower than with annuals and many species emerge at different times although in a regular British year, most of the seedlings will appear in late spring to early summer onwards.



Irrigation

If you experience warm dry weather between the end of April through to late June then irrigation will make a considerable difference to the long term success of your meadow. In many years this may not be necessary as there is enough rainfall but the small seedlings are sensitive to lack of moisture especially if sown onto a mulch. You will need to really soak the top 2 cm of the mulch/soil, ideally ensuring this happens every 4 days without rain and until the young plants are strongly established



Establishment Cuts

In year one it is important to establish a good dense sward by cutting the whole meadow twice in late June and again in mid-August. Aim to cut to around 100 mm in height. Apart from really strengthening the plants it prevents faster growing species from shading out the slower ones and also helps to discourage annual weed growth which even in the best prepared ground will still be trying to invade. Depending on scale you can use a pedestrian or ride on mower, a hedge trimmer or a strimmer.



1st Year Weed Control

The more effort you put into Year One the easier and better your meadow will be afterwards. Apart from cutting, keep a close eye on any perennial weeds or coarse grasses. They are best tackled about a month after the summer cuts – get rid of them by chemical or mechanical means. Once the sward closes over the meadow will be much less vulnerable to invasion but at this stage it needs nurturing.

End of Season Cut and Collect

At the end of the growing season you should give your young meadow a final end of season cut and collect. If your meadow now looks like these you can start looking ahead to a much less strenuous and much more colourful year ahead



Long Term Management

Download *Caring for my Perennial Meadow*

More Questions about establishing a perennial meadow from seed?

Check out the *Frequently asked Questions*

