

How to....

create a wildflower meadow



If you want to create a wildflower meadow LCBN is here to help you out.

First things first, find a **suitable site**. It should be sunny and have soil that will hold moisture but does not need to be too fertile, in fact native wildflowers like infertile soil and other weeds such as grasses won't fare very well here so will not clog up your wildflower patch. Ideally it will be near where you live so that you can easily keep an eye on its progress as it grows and enjoy its beauty when it blooms.

Once you have found a suitable site you need to find out **who owns it**, it will either be privately owned or under the jurisdiction of the local council. Once you have established this then find out if they will let you use it. If it is privately owned there is a good chance that the owner will let you use it if you explain all the benefits of having a wildflower garden, including a healthier, more biodiverse locality and not to mention a beautiful colourful area that would brighten up any neighbourhood, and possibly even add value to the property. If it is owned by the local council call the environmental department and tell them what you would like to do often they will ask you to send them something in writing. This is not as difficult as it may seem, have a look at LCBN's proposals and the [Page](#).

[***What's in a proposal?***](#)

Once you have established the right to use the land then the work starts!

How to....

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First and foremost you should get some people to help out, call your friends, ask on Facebook, put a notice on the site and tell people what you're going to do. Often people in urban areas that have no garden of their own are delighted to have an outlet like this and as the saying goes, many hands make light work! You'll need some gardening tools to create a wildflower meadow, but not many. A hoe, a rake and a spade are pretty much everything you need.

Now you're ready to get your hands Dirty !

With a wildflower meadow, weed control is very important. Weeds are a successful wildflower meadow's biggest threat. Of course, only you can determine what is a weed and what is a wildflower, but for the sake of simplicity I would suggest you start your garden with a clean palette and remove all existing vegetation. Here are two proven organic methods of doing this.

1. Weed or remove sod by hand. If you are starting with a small area or if you are planting where healthy grass is growing, this may be your best option.
2. Solarization is a good way to kill all vegetation, including most seeds. Mow the area to be planted as low as your lawn mower will allow. You might need to clear some larger stones! Water the area well and then cover securely with clear plastic sheeting, leaving it there to bake in the sun for 6 - 8 weeks. This method relies on cooperation from the weather and you will probably still want to remove the dead vegetation before reseeding.

Once you have a clear area you can **prepare it for sowing**. The ideal sowing times are between mid-March to late May and again in late August to late September for flowering the following year. Till the soil shallowly to a depth of about 3 inches once the existing vegetation is removed. Rake and level the soil as much as you can, leaving the grooves left from raking to help hold the seeds and give them contact with the soil.



How to....

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Now it's time to sow. Always read the instructions on the packet that your seeds came in. As a general rule you should use approx. 1 teaspoon of wildflower seed per square meter. This may seem like a very thin layer but if you imagine that each of those seeds has the potential to become a flowering plant then the area will be very full when the plants mature.

Most wildflower seeds are very small so mixing some sand in with the seed mixture will make it easier to see and spread evenly. Sow the seeds evenly throughout the area to be planted. Rake the soil lightly again after spreading the seed to ensure that they are just below the surface of the soil.

Water the area if you can but at LCBN we find that the Irish weather will generally do this for you! Keep the seeds moist until they are a few inches tall, again Irish weather comes in handy for this! A light mulching with straw, peat or compost will help retain moisture and keep the birds from eating the meadow. It's much like starting grass seed.



Germination should occur in 10 - 21 days and your first blooms should reward you in 5-6 weeks.

The meadow should attract all sorts of birds and bees and other insects. LCBN recommends taking a picnic and some of your favourite people to sit and **enjoy** the fruits (or should we say flowers!) of your labour.

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But the work is not over yet! To ensure a healthy flourishing meadow it will require some maintenance. This involves cutting it back regularly. Correct timing when cutting the meadow is crucial to the survival of seedlings. During the seedling establishment phase in the first year it is important that you cut and remove the growth of grasses & flowers each Autumn. Cutting the growth away allows the sun to warm the soil and for fresh air to circulate over the tiny seedlings. If your original cultivation methods did not produce a clean weed-free seedbed, this is your chance to get rid of stones and weeds that you have missed.

Use a strimmer with blade attachment or a finger / sickle bar mower. Most pure wildflowers need only be cut when flowers fade in autumn. On fertile sites from 4 - 8 cuts per year may be required to reduce fertility during the seedling establishment phase. It is very important that you remove all of the cuttings as if it is left on the site it may smother the seedlings, go mouldy or allow weeds to flourish in the fertile soil.

There are a huge number of online resources for planting and maintaining wildflower meadows. At LCBN we find that <http://www.wildflowers.ie> is an excellent source of information with everything from choosing the right seed for your area to long term maintenance. WE hope you found this information useful and enjoy your wildflowers as much as we do!



Limerick City Biodiversity Network