

Procedures & Guidelines for Enhancing Wildlife within the Community



Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to enable communities, the parish council and landowners to adopt and manage a patch of land for the benefit of wildlife and people in accordance with specific guidelines, policies and procedures.

Things to think about:

Land Ownership

Before creating a patch for wildlife, you will need to find out who owns the area (if anyone) and who cuts it, talk to them about what management has taken place in the past (if any) and seek permission to work on the land. Some areas are owned by Devon County Council (contact the Neighbourhood Highway Officer to find out: customer@devon.gov.uk. or Tel: 0345 1551004). The land could be owned by a Parish Council or owned privately and steps must be taken to ensure permission has been given, in writing, to work on the land by the owner.

Health & Safety

- a) Everyone involved must understand that there may be hazards when working on areas of land or within the vicinity of a highway
Communities/individuals who wish to carry out work must show evidence that they have undertaken the DCC highway safety awareness e-learning course. In order to enrol please contact your parish/town clerk to confirm that you are interested in receiving training. They can contact DCC Highways Services, and they will be able to provide the necessary information to enable you to access the training package.

- b) All volunteers for Fremington Parish Council are covered by Public Liability insurance, the volunteer must notify the Parish Council that they wish to volunteer, and a risk assessment must be undertaken.

Assessing the area

- a) What is on the land/area (wildlife/species/habitat) a survey can be undertaken to establish what (if anything) is already in place. (provide/create survey)
- b) Establish what you wish to do to the land (rich grassland, scrub or simply wildflowers)
- c) How do you get the land to how it is wanted – perhaps come up with a plan starting with what you want to achieve. Try to have an idea of what actions you want to take. Rewilding is not about having a hard and fast endpoint in mind. It is about helping nature do its thing and go its own way as much as possible. But you need to determine and plan the interventions that will help to kick-start the rewilding process. Rewilding is a long-term thing, but you want to do as much as you can to get things going.

Getting Started

There are a few approaches you can follow when it comes to working on areas of land.

1. Work to enhance wildflowers already on site
 - a. More desirable approach
 - b. Less labour intensive
 - c. Work with natural flora already in place
2. Lowering soil nutrients to give wildflowers a chance in the future. Use this approach if:
 - a. There is vigorous grass growth
 - b. The areas have been cut regularly for many years and the cuttings are left to rot into the ground
 - c. If there is not much evidence at present of plants other than grass
3. Creating a wildflower patch from scratch. Use this approach if:
 - a. The area shows little sign of diversity, if the area is pure grass
 - b. If you want quick results, or want to create a good seed supply to be used elsewhere the following year
 - c. If it is a new area is on a building site or new road

You can create a wildflower area from scratch on bare ground. Pick a poor patch of ground that has not been cultivated recently as wildflower areas establish best on unproductive soil. It is worth checking what sort of soil you have and its pH before you choose which seeds to sow; wildflower seed merchants supply mixes suitable for various soil types and situations. (Not all commercial wildflower mixes contain purely native species. They are therefore not all suitable for use on our verges. Before sowing a wildflower mix, agree it first with Devon County Council).

To create your patch from scratch:

- Control weeds by digging or rotovating, burying any vegetation to a depth of 15-20 cm (6-8 in). This also brings less fertile soil to the surface.
- Firm and rake the surface to make a seedbed.
- Do not be tempted to add manure or fertiliser as this will encourage excessive vigour in the grasses, which then swamp the wildflowers. This is the most important principle in establishing a wildflower area.
- Sow in autumn, giving the seed time to settle in over winter. If you are on heavy clay, however, it is better to wait until spring. Even large areas can be sown by hand quite easily.
- Ensure that the seed is scattered evenly by sowing half lengthways and the remaining half widthways across the plot. Mixing the seed with silver sand makes the process easier. Rake in lightly and water thoroughly.

Recommended Annual Management

- **January to March** If the area has spring flowers do not cut during this period. If there is a summer flowering area you can cut and remove arisings up until March.
- **April – September** Spring flowering patches can be cut, and arisings removed from July onwards. Ensure seed has set (ripened and fallen), the exact timing of the first cut depends on the year and the weather. You might need a scythe or a strimmer for the first cut, but after that a standard mower will be fine. If it is a small enough patch you might even get by with a pair of garden shears. If you have both spring and summer flowers on the area or are unsure when to cut, wait until October. Do not cut Summer flowering until October – avoid the desire to ‘tidy up’ the long straggly vegetation. If it is a hot year and the seed has set then a late September cut is possible. Patience’s will be rewarded with flowers in subsequent years!
- **October to the end December** Cut and remove all arisings. This can be done just once or several times during these months. This basic regime of cutting and removing the grass mimics the traditional pattern of hay-cutting followed by grazing, to which many meadow flowers are adapted. If cuttings are left to rot the debris will fertilise the ground, encouraging tough grasses to take over at the expense of the wildflowers you are trying to encourage. Grass clippings left lying will also smother germinating wildflower seeds that are trying to get a foothold during the autumn.

Changing Mind-Sets

You may come up against those who like to see everything manicured. To help make the area appear to be ‘in control’ and therefore more acceptable to those who wish to see tidy edges it is advisable to regularly cut a strip (up to a 1m) around the edge of, or through, the verge. Again, removing the arisings is preferable. It may also be necessary for highways to cut a 1m strip for visibility and safety reasons.