



## **Parks and Landscape Services Division**

### **Practically managing a wildflower meadow**

A *spring meadow* will contain grasses such as sweet vernal, meadow foxtail, red fescue and common bent. It will have wildflowers such as Cowslips, Lady's Smock, Cat's ear, Ox-eye daisy and Meadow buttercup. This area is cut once a year in early July. The cuttings are removed to keep fertility low. A wildflower meadow thrives in poor soil.

A *summer meadow* is in full bloom from June to October. It too will have Ox-eye daisies as well as lovely late-flowering meadow perennials such as Field scabious, Greater knapweed, Rough hawkbit, Lady's Bedstraw and Yarrow.

A *cornfield meadow* contains annuals such as Cornflowers, Poppies, Corncockles, Chamomiles and Corn marigolds. The area for these has to be dug and cultivated in imitation of an arable field. The seeds are sown in September/October.

Many butterflies use meadow grasses as food plants for their caterpillars. It also provides cover for frogs, mammals and insects.

Keep area clear of weeds for up to a year before planting.

In general, if you're not too sure what kind of meadow you have, you can follow these simple suggestions:

- Cut and remove to 100mm (4in) in early October. This allows plants and grasses to go to seed and by now, invertebrates are no longer active in the meadow.
- Spring time; check meadows for species such as Rye grass taking over. If it is then give a light cut and remove to approx 125-150mm (5-6in).
- During the growing season leave the meadow alone unless there is major growth of larger species such as thistles, nettles, docks, etc. If this is the case, remove some by hand.

Note: It is the method of cutting and removal of vegetation that will improve the meadows. The methods used will determine the level at which nutrients will decrease in the soil therefore facilitate lack of growth of unwanted larger species.

What probably helps the visual look of the meadows is the use of cylinder mowers to cut the lawns surrounding the meadows; thus giving a very sharp and fine contrast to the meadows.

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