

Plant native

giving nature a helping hand

Naturezones Wildlife Education Trust
www.naturezones.org.uk



What are Native Species Plants?

You might be surprised to learn that a plant is considered to be native of this country if it has grown naturally here since the last ice age (over 6,000 years ago).

These plants are pollinated by native insects as they collect nectar. These insects evolved at the same time as the plants.

Native plant is a term to describe plants endemic (indigenous) or naturalized to a given area in geologic time. This includes plants that have developed, occurred naturally, or existed in an area for many years (e.g. trees, flowers, grasses, and other plants).

Some native plants have adapted to very limited, unusual environments or very harsh climates or exceptional soil conditions. However, others can live in diverse areas or by adaptation to different surroundings.

Why are native species plants important?

Research has found that insects depend on native plants. An ecosystem—of which there are many—describes the interaction of plants, animals, and micro-organisms with their physical (e.g., soil conditions and processes) and climatic conditions.

A plant becomes native to the environment where it has evolved and the environment will have evolved because of the plants that have grown. If a plant disappears the environment will go with it. For example the Amazon rain forest is disappearing along with its animals because the plants (trees) are being cut down.

So, a plant exists because a certain animal pollinates the plant and that animal exists because it relies on the nectar as a source of food.

The size of the insects proboscis will have evolved over thousand of years with the native plant to marry neatly into the petals nectar cup or similar. Different native plants are pollinated by different insects and some need specific plants to feed off.

Smile, bee coming



A few of their favourite foods

- Glanville Fritillary larvae—Hoary Plantain
- Chalk hill blue butterfly—Horseshoe vetch
- Cinnabar moth caterpillar—ragwort
- Bumble bee—Red Clover
- Holly Blue—Holly
- Primroses—Brimstone butterfly



Visit our web site to see how local schools created wildflower area with Naturezones. www.plantnative.org.uk



Grow your own wildflower patch

Now wouldn't you just think that a wild flower garden was easy to grow? After all, we are forever weeding them out of the veg patch and the perennial border. They are pernicious little devils self-seeding all over the place. And their roots! they are so deep. In fact wild flowers are extremely fussy. Conditions are everything. But isn't that true of our cultivated flowers? If they don't like the soil or the climate they won't grow.

The most noticeable difference is the seed. The outer husk of a wild flower seed is very hard so they take longer to germinate, in some cases as long as three years. Unlike cultivated seed it is best to sow the seed in the winter when the cold weather will help to break down this husk. You can still sow seed in spring or summer but you will have to wait until the following year for any sort of showing. Another disadvantage of a summer sowing is that the grass will have grown on the prepared ground thus making it difficult for the plantlets to push their way through the grasses.

The first and even the second year, can be disappointing. I would advise sowing a nursery crop, or a mixture of cornflower annuals such as corn flower, corn marigold, corn daisy, corn cockle, poppy and forget-me-not. Not only will you get a pretty showing of flowers in the first year they also like fertile soil which is a bonus as they will deplete the fertility. Wild flowers prefer infertile soil. Have you noticed how wild flowers flourish on derelict building sites where there is little soil?

I have never been able to do this but, I have read advice that says cut off the WF flower heads the first year they flower to encourage the root system to grow. It is also worth noting that some wild flowers only flower every other year. So you may get a great showing of say oxeye daisies one year but not the next.

There are several ways to grow a WF area. At Naturezones we tried several methods some more successful than others



When you sow a packet of wild flower seeds it will depend upon the soil and climate conditions in your area as to whether they will all germinate

Management

Once your mini meadow is established it is essential that you manage it for successful future years.

Competition is great and grasses can quite quickly stifle a flower meadow. At Naturezones we cut the meadow in late August early September. That way we have allowed plenty of seed to fall before we cut it. A meadow is normally cut in late May/early June. As this is when the grass/hay is most nutritious for farm animals. Our hay is second growth (aftermath) and not so rich but still very good as it is full of herbage/wildflowers.

As an experiment we cut one small area in June and I have to say there are less wildflowers in that area as we have not allowed seed to form and drop.

We also cut one small area in February (called the second cut). This seems a good idea and encouraged early purple orchids to pop up in late May. Whatever else you do, you must cut and remove the cuttings after they have dried out (no more than 3-4 day/ if you do area preventing the wild flowers from pushing their way through.

Method	Action	Success - Marks out 10
Scrape	Remove the top 9 inches of soil to get down to the fertile sub-soil. So wseed in August/September	8 1st year poor showing each year got better.
Mats/carpets	Lay old carpet on the chosen area and leave for 6 months. Remove the carpet to expose bare soil. Ideally this should be done in July but not everyone wants to look at carpet in their garden in the summer. So lay the carpet in early October and so your seeds in March. A later sowing will mean a longer wait.	10 We had a showing of wild flowers from the word go and each year got better
Rotivate	Constantly rotate the chosen area until the seed bed of "Weeds" are exhausted. We tried this at the top of our meadow where we had a lot of dock. We rotated then as the seedlings shot up we rotated again. It was a long and painstaking job and we decided there were better ways	3 We did reduce the dock. And if you are only doing a small area like a border it will be successful.
Poison	This method works but we don't like it. Some people say you need to attack chemicals with chemical. Chemicals are used to encourage growth so you need chemicals to discourage growth. Many farms will use this method as it has good results. But, there are rules if near a water course	8 We prefer to spot poison individual plants
Planting perennials in the long grass	Buy small wild flower plants, the bigger the better. Dig hole in the grass and plant. If you can manage it put a mesh guard around. Rabbits are good at sniffing out the compost which they like to eat. Make sure the plant surround is well covered with soil	6 Can be successful in small areas
Scarify	Cut your lawn grass really short almost scalping it to exposing patches of bare soil. Scarify (rake) to break up the surface of the lawn and to remove any thatch of dead grass that may have formed. Then sow the seed	6 works well
Semi-parasitic plants	There is a plant called hay or yellow rattle that is semi parasitic on grasses. As the yellow rattle grows it suppresses the growth of grass. This action gives the wild flower a chance to get established before the grasses take over. Scarify the area and then sow the seed on bare soil	7 This works rather well. In our meadow we sowed a patch and over the years it has spread.