

Environmental Tip of the Month. April 2021

Give pollinators a chance. Let your lawn grow!

We can all do our bit for the environment by creating a flower rich lawn, a patch of long grass or a mini meadow. It doesn't have to be very big, perhaps just a small part of your lawn, but it will provide a haven for bees, insects and invertebrates and provide them with food and shelter.

A tightly clipped weed free lawn is not wildlife friendly. However, you don't need to replace your lawn to make it more attractive to wildlife. Simple steps such as reducing the amount of mowing and not using fertiliser and weedkiller on your lawn will help to encourage wildlife. Weedkillers and fertilisers are designed to eliminate any plant that is not grass and to make a lawn greener and more lush. By not using them you will give flowering plants a chance, which means they can provide nectar and pollen for bees and other pollinating insects.

You can choose how high to let the grass on your lawn grow. By simply setting the lawn mower a little higher it may be sufficient to allow low growing flowers like daisies, and dandelions to grow, and solitary bees may find nesting spots in a low grassy area. It will also provide extra protection from the sun making it more resilient during a drought.

* Did you know that dandelions provide an excellent source of pollen for flies, bumble bees and solitary bees.

You may want to go a little further (and higher!) by reducing the frequency of mowing to every 4-6 weeks. This will give lawn flowers such as speedwell, self heal, creeping buttercups and clover time to bloom.

* Did you know that bumble bees love clover and will forage for nectar on lawns where clover is allowed to flower?

Or, you could go the whole way and simply stop mowing your lawn (or part of it) between March and the end of August. Many grasses when allowed to grow provide food for a wide range of invertebrates including the caterpillars of some butterflies and moths such as skippers, meadow brown, speckled wood, gatekeepers, ringlets, and small heath butterflies. Not mowing during this time will allow them to lay their eggs and complete their life cycle. Long grass creates a mini jungle for grasshoppers and many other invertebrates. If your lawn is very lush you may need to mow once or twice during the summer but if you do, try and keep a small patch unmown to avoid disturbing hungry caterpillars.

* Leave a 1m x 1m square of lawn uncut for the whole summer? Get the whole family to record how many plants and creatures you spot.

If your lawn doesn't contain many flowers or you would like to add some extra wildflowers you can either sow some wild flower seed undercover in seed trays in the Spring and when they are big enough transplant them into your lawn, or you can purchase wildflower seedplugs www.wildflower.co.uk to plant into your lawn. Scattering wildflower seed directly onto an area of grass doesn't usually work as the ground needs specific preparation before sowing wildflower seed.

Here are just a few wildflower suggestions suitable for a shorter grass wild area:-

Birds foot trefoil, self heal, violets, wild thyme

For grass that is left completely uncut over the summer a few suggestions:-

Devil's bit scabious, field scabious, hemp agrimony, knapweed, mallow, wild marjoram, wild carrot, ox eye daisy, teasel, red and white campion.

To make a feature of your "meadow" you could leave an edge around the lawn to define it or mow a pathway through the middle.

To get the best out of your flower rich lawn, mow it short between September and February. A word of caution though, do not trim using strimming string as this is very hazardous to hidden wildlife. If you must trim, use a blade attachment or use garden shears or a mower with a scythe cutter bar. After cutting leave the grass for a week to allow it to shed any seed and then rake and clear the lawn. You may need to scarify and aerate your lawn if you are not using weedkillers and fertilisers on it.

Year on year if you do this you may find other wildflower species find their way into your wildlife "meadow".

Further reading: The Garden Jungle, by Dave Goulson

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