



Ymylon Gwylt Ymylon Gwell Gwynedd – Life on the Verge Gwynedd FAQs

Resilient Green Spaces – Greener Corridors and Spaces

Who can get involved?

- Any individual or group – including community councils, voluntary groups, schools and clubs. Children clearly can't cut the grass but they can be involved in simple surveying, if the site is safe. This could be a great maths lesson with lots of measuring and counting!

How can I get involved?

- You as an individual, community group or community council will read through this guidance and identify a verge or public green space you think is suitable to manage as a meadow habitat
- Talk to anyone local you think might be interested – for example the community council, community groups, local residents and show them this guidance
- We (Social Farms & Gardens and Gwynedd Council) can come and give a talk on the project in your local village hall
- We will assess the verge, talk to the community council, get permission from the Highways dept. or other landowner/manager and come and help you devise a simple management plan
- You (or a group representative/s) will complete our simple Highways safety training if necessary
- We'll find out if it's possible to change the cutting regime – or take it out of the contract altogether
- We will provide all the signage, tools and training needed, provide compost bags and take away the cuttings
- You will continue to manage your verge and do simple surveys to record the increase in biodiversity over time

How much time/effort is involved?

You'll need to actively manage your verge at least twice a year and there will also be some time involved initially while you get set up. As part of Resilient Green Spaces, we ask that you take part in some evaluation work too.

Why can't the council do this work?

The council do already manage many conservation verges which contain priority species. We need your local knowledge to identify areas that are suitable, and to help look after them.

What if some people object and think it's messy?

That's why we are providing guidance and support on how to choose a suitable space and how to make sure people in your community know what's happening and why. For example, a verge that's widely used by children for playing or pedestrians for walking wouldn't be suitable. Part of the project is also about changing perceptions. Often people just don't know how valuable this habitat is.

How to choose a verge/green space – ask these questions

- Is it within a 20 mph zone – or separated from the highway by a footpath?
- Is it generally unused by walkers or children playing?
- Is it plenty wide enough to work safely on?
- If it's a different kind of green space like the area around a community centre or a cemetery – is it possible to meet the needs of all users – for example by having a mown area and wilder edges?

Once you've identified a suitable potential verge/s or green spaces in your area please fill in [this contact form](#) and send to sarah@farmgarden.org.uk or hywynwilliams@gwynedd.llyw.cymru

Getting Started

Why Grow Wildflowers On The Verges?

Native wildflowers and grasses

Since the Second World War, 97% of the UK's species-rich grasslands have been wiped out due to modern farming practices and urban development. During this time the number of pollinator species, including the wild bee, has fallen.

With less agricultural demand on verges than the meadows they can be a vital refuge for British wildlife, from insects to reptiles, mammals and birds. Verges provide a valuable space that can be put to use, creating much needed wildlife habitat.

There are nearly half a million kilometres of rural road verge in the UK, this is equal to half of our remaining flower-rich grasslands and meadows. Across the UK, verges are home to over 700 species of wild flower and are home to many familiar wild flowers that are now becoming threatened.

A note about the difference between pictorial meadows and native species rich grasslands. You can buy packets of 'wildflower' seeds that create a beautiful display of annual cornfield flowers in just a couple of months. These are lovely to use in a garden bed, but they generally don't contain the native species we want to encourage in our verges and meadows which have co-evolved with our native insects, are largely perennial and perhaps a bit less showy! Meadows in North Wales just don't have the same plants as a traditional corn field in Somerset. You can clearly see the difference in the pictures below.



Pictorial Meadow
Photo Credit: Canva



Caeau Tan y Bwlch
Photo Credit: Damien Hughes/NWWT

Insects

Have you noticed there are very few insects stuck on the car windscreens after a drive in the country, compared with a few years ago? The population of insects is collapsing right in front of our eyes.

The decline is a worrying trend as insects are the cornerstone of all terrestrial ecosystems, they are a vital part of the food chains for both wildlife and humans. The knock-on effects of the insect population collapse, flows up through the food chain, wiping out higher animals. And without healthy ecosystems, there is no clean air and water. Insects are indispensable to our food production, they are also critical for creating the beauty of our parks, gardens and countryside.

There are more than a 20,000 species of insect across the UK, many of which would benefit from the natural habitat of a wildflower verge. Among these insects there are at least 1,500 species of pollinating insects, they range from honeybees to wild bumble bees, moths, butterflies, wasps, beetles and hoverflies... the list goes on!

A good verge will supply a diverse source of nectar and pollen from the first celandines in February to the last Devil's-bit scabious in September. Bird's-foot trefoil alone is a food plant for over 130 species of invertebrate.

People

Verges are also important for people – whether you're walking, cycling or driving, verges in full bloom really lift the spirits. And with the constant bad news about the climate and biodiversity – seeing our native wildflowers thriving makes us feel more positive – like we are caring for nature – and gives hope that maybe we can turn the tide.

Creating a Wildflower Verge/Greenspace

We will help you to write a plan for how to look after and improve your verge. It's not a difficult process and you can get started by reading this guide.

When you choose a suitable verge, you can do a simple survey to find out what species grow there already. If the site has only ever been cut and never fertilised or reseeded – there may already be many wildflowers present. We call this Species Rich. A site like this will respond really well to minimal management – you can just cut and collect twice a year and watch the wildflowers flourish!

If, however, there aren't many wildflowers present, or it has been seeded with a mix of strong grasses, you will need to do a bit more work.

Have a look at this helpful Plantlife poster which explains it really clearly

https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/2916/2341/1519/How_to_create_a_meadow_Plantlife_poster.pdf

Approach 1: Working to enhance wildflowers already on site

This is the desirable approach to shaping a wildflower verge as it tends to be less labour intensive and works with the natural flora already in place. It can often throw up pleasant surprises that lay dormant in the soil.

Use this approach if:

- There are already a mix of plants (not just grasses),
- If you are planning to enhance an existing wildflower verge and plan to get it back into good management.

What to do: In the Autumn (mid to late September up until the end of December), check to see that the majority of seeds have matured and fallen. Then cut the vegetation at ground level. The intention is to remove all the cuttings which you may do at the same time as cutting or leave to dry out for a day or two to make the work lighter (you are mimicking a hay meadow cut). If you have done an early autumn cut, you can continue to cut the verge until the end of December, ensure all arisings are removed. You may choose to create a compost area on site, under a hedge or nearby trees. (ensure cuttings will not blow into the road or block visibility).

Approach 2: Lowering soil nutrients to give wildflowers a chance in the future

This approach is useful if you have large areas to manage and you want to enhance the verge for wildflowers. It requires a long term outlook as it works over several years.

Use this approach if:

- The verges have vigorous grass growth.
- The verges have been cut regularly for many years and the cuttings left to rot into the ground.
- If there isn't much evidence at present of plants other than grass.

What to do:

- This approach requires grass verges to be cut and arisings collected at least three times during the growing season in the first year (possibly two years on very fertile soils).
- Ideally cut in April, July and September or once the grass reaches a height of 15-20cm. In the long run this significantly reduces the fertility of the soil so slows the grass growth rate and stunts the grass height, this in turn allows wildflowers (often there is seed in the soil already) to grow.

If desired, seed could also be sown after the first year as they are less likely to be outcompeted by the stronger grasses the following spring and therefore this gives a better success rate

Approach 3 – Creating a wildflower verge from scratch

Often people feel the need to sow seed for quick results. This method does come with risk, occasionally seed does not germinate or it gets eaten by hungry birds! Try to find a local seed source/supplier as the success rate will be greatly improved.

Use this approach if:

- The verge shows little sign of diversity ie the area is pure grass.
- If you want quick results, or want to create a good seed supply to be used elsewhere the following year.
- If it is a new verge on a building site or new road.

What to do:

- Ground preparation and time of year are essential for this approach to work. Seed sowing is most successful when carried out in the autumn (September – October) Or in early spring, March.
- Cut the grass back as low as you can and rake the ground to break up the soil and bring bare patches to the surface.
- If the soil is deep or the grass thick, you may decide to turf the grass and remove it, then break up the soil ready for sowing-
- Mix your British wildflower seed mix with coarse sand, then scatter over the area, once on the ground lightly tread in the seed. You can also plant bulbs or plug plants-
- Once flowering is over wait until the seed has set and falls to the ground ready for next year, usually this will be late summer/ early autumn, then cutting and removing the arisings-

The key factor required for wildflowers is maintaining low soil nutrients (ie. Low levels of phosphates and nitrogen), this is the opposite to growing cereals, silage or vegetable crops. Fertile soils favour lush green grass, dock and nettle; these are fast growing tall plants that out compete the delicate wildflowers for space and light. They prevent pollinators from finding the flowers and will eventually swamp them entirely. Wildflowers thrive in low nutrient soils where grasses, nettles and dock grow at a much slower rate.

Surveying

In North Wales, our local environmental records centre is called Cofnod. It exists to hold records of species found in this area. Over time this can give a picture of what's thriving and what conservation work needs to be prioritised. If you register and record the species on your site it would be really helpful. You can do this on the ORS website (<https://cofnod-ors.lerc.online/Login?ReturnUrl=%2F>) or there's a mobile app called LERC Wales you can use which uses your phones GPS to automatically record the location: <https://www.lercwales.org.uk/app.php> It's best to survey when plants are in flower – as flowering times differ you could survey several times between April and September to get a picture of what you have in your verge.

Use this great meadow i.d. leaflet from Plantlife to help i.d. the plants in your verge:

http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/assets/pdfs/Meadow_ID_Leaflet.pdf

You can also try using a plant i.d. app like [PlantNet](#) which is really fun and easy to use and surprisingly accurate.

Invasive Species

Invasive plants have evolved in other parts of the world along with their own pests and diseases. They don't have an ecological niche here or any pests to keep them under control. They can overwhelm our native plants and become dominant. It is an offense to cause them to spread and it's very important that they aren't spread unintentionally by cutting or digging up and fragments being dispersed. The plants you're likely to come across locally that are an issue are;

- Himalayan Balsam - *Impatiens glandulifera*
- Montbretia - *Crocasmia x crocosmiiflora*
- Japanese Knotweed - *Reynoutria japonica*

We can advise you on removing Himalayan Balsam and Montbretia – but Japanese Knotweed is best dealt with by professionals.

Health and Safety

If you're working on a verge there are important Health and Safety considerations. One member of your group or community council may need to do a short course to use signs on the verge and we'll need you to complete an online quiz to make sure you know how to work safely on the verge. Even if you're not working on a verge you'll need to complete a Risk Assessment to make sure your volunteers are working safely – this is especially important if you're responsible for children. We can help you with this if you haven't done a Risk Assessment before.

Acknowledgments and further reading

Plantlife

These resources are a simple introduction – if you want to delve deeper into the subject of wildflower verges and wild plants in general please explore Plantlife's fantastic free resources.

- Plantlife Meadows Hub <https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk/>
- Plantlife Good Verge Guide – approachable but comprehensive https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/7916/1191/6240/Road_verge_guide_2021_WEB.pdf
- This project is inspired by Life on the Verge in Devon – a partnership project between DCC and the Tarka Country Trust. We based these resources on theirs – you can read more about their project here: <https://www.tarkacountrytrust.org.uk/love-b-524226.html>

Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project being led by Social Farms & Gardens to pilot alternative re-localised food systems using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change across Wales until June 2023. This project is funded through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the Welsh Government and the European Union.



How to make a meadow with native wild flowers

Even if you only have a small area, you can enjoy a meadow full of native wild flowers. Your local wildlife will thank you for it. All you have to do is mow differently...

Choose an open, sunny area for your meadow, with no nettles or brambles. Then take a closer look in spring and summer – what's already growing there? A good meadow can be home to more than 100 different grasses and flowers.

If your area is bare ground or has fewer than five wild flowers



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If your area has more than five different wild flowers already



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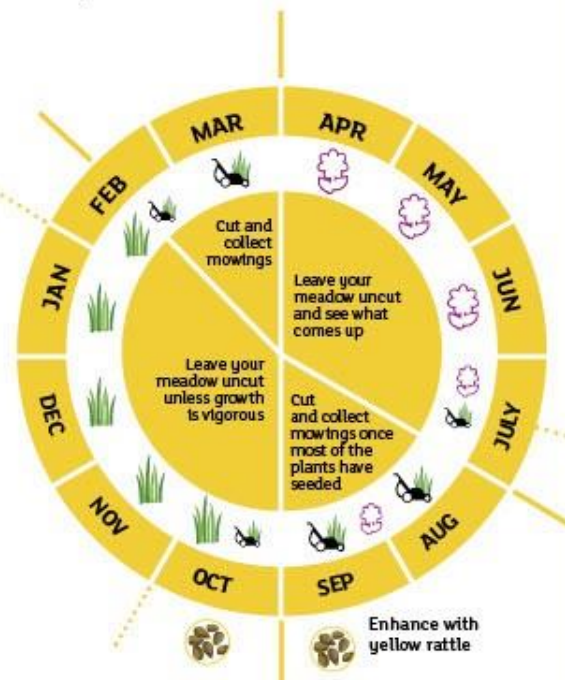
CREATE a meadow

In late summer or early autumn, cut the grass short, create bare ground and seed the area

- You'll need a mower, strimmer or scythe and a rake to collect the mowings because if left, they will decompose and enrich the soil with nutrients. Wild flowers thrive in nutrient-poor soil.
- You can compost the mowings or create [habitat piles](#) to encourage other wildlife.
- Create at least 50% bare ground by raking vigorously or by using a hand scarifier that can be rented. Larger areas are best done with a harrow.
- If you have a larger area and know a local farmer, you can seed the area using [green hay](#).
- Or you can buy native wildflower seeds from your local seed supplier. Double-check the seed is not sourced from outside the UK. Read '[Keeping the wild in wildflower](#)' to find out more.
- Try mixing your seed with sand for easier spreading. Sprinkle and gently trample in. During dry spells, water if possible, but don't wash away the seeds!
- In the coming months, pull up any creeping thistle and dock, or cut the flower heads off before they set seed. These can spread fast and smother wild flowers.
- Don't worry if your meadow looks a bit plain in its first year. Many native perennials take a couple of years to establish.

ENHANCE a meadow

If you already have some wild flowers present, simply follow the annual plan below to see even more flowers return over time



From the second year onwards follow the annual management plan