

NATIVE WILD- FLOWERS AND GRASSLAND

LAND

ECO  **CHURCH**
AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT



ALLCHURCHES TRUST LIMITED®
OWNERS OF ECCLESIASTICAL INSURANCE GROUP

www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



LAND

Native wildflowers

WHY?

As early as the 1980s the Nature Conservancy Council estimated that 98% of species-rich meadowland had been lost in the previous 30 years. This is such a significant problem that at its Millennium Seedbank at Wakehurst, Kew Botanic Gardens created a UK Native Seed Collection which by 2010 held over 96% of seeds for all native flora. There is a growing awareness that churchyards (especially in villages) contain the last remnants of ancient meadows that used to cover the countryside. So churchyards are havens, not just for wildflowers, but also for lichens, mosses, grasses, ferns, fungi and many other species of plant and animal: <https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/uk-native-seed-hub>

In a lowland county, such as Norfolk, some meadow flowers have 50% or more of their surviving population in churchyards. Norfolk is one of several Wildlife Trusts that has established a churchyard conservation scheme or offers advice on local grassland management: <https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/churchyards/churchyard-conservation-scheme>

Do find out if your local Wildlife Trust, Church of England Diocese or similar body offers such a scheme.

Whether your outside space at church is old or new, large or small, you can contribute to preserving diversity by encouraging native species which provide food sources for native wildlife.



LAND

Native wildflowers

HOW?

Firstly, it is worth doing a survey of your plants before thinking about sowing wildflower seeds, otherwise you risk upsetting the existing plant balance by the introduction of new species. See our resource called 'Simple Wildflower Survey'.

There may be a lot of variety already, so let the grass grow and see what species reappear. You may find plants which had not had the chance to flourish previously because of grass cuts or the addition of fertilisers. Wildflowers flourish on land of low fertility so it may take a couple of years of removing the hay crop, thereby reducing soil fertility, to discover if there is a viable seed bank in the soil and what type of flowers appear.

You may have people within the church or local community who can look at the churchyard throughout the year to see which plants and wildflowers are appearing. It's tricky to identify plants from their vegetative growth, so it's essential that some trial areas are left uncut to give plants a chance to flower and be identified. These resources may be useful to help you:

HELP WITH IDENTIFICATION

- https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/wildflower_Meadow_ID_guide.pdf
- <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants/wild-flowers/>
- <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/wildflowers>

Alternatively ask for help from your local Wildlife Trust, Plantlife group, Caring for God's Acre or the A Rocha Advisors Network – it's just possible we have someone near you! Contact details are here:

- <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-trusts>
- <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk>
- <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/about-us/how-can-we-help-you/>
- <https://arocha.org.uk/our-activities/advisor-network/>



LAND

Native wildflowers

Slopes, damp patches, shady areas and areas full of gravestones are often particularly interesting as they are harder to mow, so may have been left uncut more often and will host different species from those found in the rest of the grounds. This is because slopes experience a different microclimate from the flat areas – warmer on south-facing slopes and significantly cooler on north-facing ones.

Once you have established what is or isn't there, you will want to create a plan of the churchyard noting which areas you will leave long as spring meadows, which as summer meadows, where to cut paths, or other areas with particular purposes. This will all feed into a management plan for the churchyard.

If you do decide to sow native wildflowers where few have appeared, get advice from your local Wildlife Trust, our advisors network or similar group first, so you sow the right flower mix for your soil type and area of the country.

Integrate the needs of people as well as wildlife in your plans. Regularly communicating the reasons for changes in appearance of the churchyard, and progress being made, will go a long way to engaging the local community and gaining their support. For many it's also important to have 'garden flowers' to enjoy as part of the amenity value of the space, so mix and match to benefit everybody!



LAND

Native wildflowers

LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

For extensive advice about making and maintaining meadows visit The Plantlife Meadows Hub: <https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk/>

Caring for God's Acre has some tips on a simple survey: <https://youtu.be/O88xB10JPw>
Their starter pack helps you identify common wildlife and plants that you might find in your churchyard. <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CfGA-Starter-Guide-2020.pdf>

BOOKS

Wildlife in church and churchyard by Nigel Cooper, Church House Publishing, 2001, is extremely helpful on this subject.

Collins Wildflower Guide, By David Street, Collins, 2016

CASE STUDIES

<https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/2020/wildflowers-thriving-after-diocesan-wildlife-garden-grant/>