

# IMPORTANCE OF GRASSLAND AND MOWING REGIMES

LAND

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## LAND

# Importance of grassland

### WHY?

Whilst grassland habitat covers about 40% of the UK, only a tiny percentage of that habitat (approximately 4.5%) is 'unimproved', meaning that it has not been affected by fertilisers, ploughing, reseeding or drainage. 'Unimproved' grassland is rich in species including wildflowers and is an invaluable habitat.

Because churchyards are often remnants of ancient habitat which have been protected for centuries, they are often valuable havens for species which are dependent on unimproved grassland. Even if a churchyard doesn't appear to be a diverse habitat, seeds may be lying dormant, waiting for the right opportunity to sprout.

*'Jesus also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."' (Mark 4:26–27)* It can be just like that in our churchyards!

### HELPFUL WEBSITES

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/grassland>

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/grassland/>



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### HOW?

We recommend you first of all draw up a map of the land you are managing and then conduct a simple plant survey to get a general sense of what is present on your land. There are then a variety of options of how to manage your grassland:

1. The simplest way to help wildlife, through grassland management, is to leave an area of grass to grow tall throughout the growing season (March – September), then mow it down short in the autumn. Remove any clippings and keep it short throughout the autumn and winter. Mark on your map which areas are being left wild, so that anyone involved in the management of the churchyard can refer to it.
2. With some planning, a more complex mowing regime can be established:
  - A spring-flowering meadow should be left uncut until the main flowers have shed their seed, and then cut short, usually from around mid-June. You can cut to 8cm every three weeks or leave it long and cut again in late August or September.
  - A summer-flowering meadow would be cut to about 8cm until say April or May and then all cutting ceased until late August or September, after everything has seeded.
  - If you have the space, why not create different areas, so you can do both options to give the widest variety of plant species and benefits to wildlife.
  - Alternatively, you may wish to leave some grass long for the whole summer or perhaps divide the space into 3 – 5 sections rotating cut and uncut sections.

Feel free to experiment with different strategies and find one which works for your land. Make sure to remove clippings, after the seed heads have fallen, by either composting them or by making hay. Removing clippings depletes the soil fertility, which creates the perfect conditions for native plants, and allows them to outcompete unwanted agricultural grasses.





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Some species prefer close cropped grass, so retaining some areas of short grass, such as around buildings, alongside paths or at frequently visited graves or plaques is a sensible choice. Mown paths through 'wild' areas, signage, and perhaps cordoning off meadows, will show visitors that the space is cared for and the management is intentional: <https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/documents/churchyard/caring-for-grasslands-web>

Some Caring for God's Acre resources:

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A2-Caring-for-Grassland-v2.pdf>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A3-Cutting-Long-Grass-and-Dealing-with-Grass-Cuttings-v2.pdf>

### LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

Caring for God's Acre produces some excellent guides on managing grassland including a webinar exploring how to manage grassland in burial grounds in a way that encourages wildflowers whilst being sensitive to visitors' needs:

<https://youtu.be/U2UJNtIjHxo>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/section-a-managing-churchyards-burial-grounds/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/films/video-grassland-management/>

### CASE STUDIES

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/burial-grounds-to-inspire/>

St James Church, Ludgershall uses a couple of sheep to keep their grassland well managed. See the separate paper.