

Creating the ultimate... *flower-rich grass margin*



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A good wild flower margin can be a very beneficial and attractive farmland habitat. If properly established and well managed, they will support a broad range of invertebrates including pollinating insects like bumblebees and honey bees; plant feeding insects such as grasshoppers, bugs and butterflies; and predatory invertebrates such as spiders and beetles. These margins should be a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers, ideally placed next to hedgerows, and should aim to provide pollen and nectar sources from spring until the autumn.



Prepare the seed bed. The old adage 'well sown is half grown' is particularly true for wild flower margins. Create a stale seedbed by cultivating the soil and then, when the weeds have germinated, spray off with glyphosate.



Top tip
Cut margins two-three times in the first year to help keep thistles, docks and weeds under control

Sow, ideally by broadcasting, in spring or late summer after first preparing a fine tilth and follow by rolling. Use a mix of fine grasses like fescues and bents. Wildflowers can comprise 5-20% of the mix.

Choose flowers that are common to the local area. Species that are both relatively easy to establish and used by a wide variety of invertebrates include bird's-foot trefoil, yarrow, lesser knapweed, sheep sorrel, vetches and ox-eye daisy.



Margins can be from three-six metres wide and should be cut two-three times in the first year. This will help keep thistles, docks and other weeds under control and allow the grasses to tiller. In subsequent years, half the margin should be cut early in the growing season and the other half later in the year – this will help prolong the flowering season. Removing the cuttings will benefit the flowers, as they can be suppressed if smothered by thick swathes of cut grass.



Keep fertiliser and spray drift out of the margins.



Well-managed margins can provide an abundance of flowers for many years and plenty of birds will use them as insect-rich foraging areas too.

