



Before farming was industrialised, meadows were the dining rooms for the farm's livestock. From late summer to early spring, the animals were left to graze in the meadows before being brought indoors to give birth and suckle their young. During this brief springtime respite the grasses were able to do some serious growing, ready to be cut in late-summer and stored as nutritious winter hay.

Today, maintenance is pretty much the same, amounting to little more than the annual cut; and of course if you have a goat or a donkey to graze your meadow you won't even need that! However, to keep your meadow at its happiest, there are a few simple guidelines to follow, especially as you, unlike the farmers of yesteryear, will want to help the flowers thrive and not be overrun by grasses. These are simple to remember once you have learned the Five Golden Rules...

The five golden rules of meadowmat maintenance

1. Reduce soil fertility For once you don't have to worry about your soil being in poor condition! Most of our beautiful native wild flowers are happiest when growing on poor soil. With too much nutrient, the grasses will thrive but only the strongest species of flower will be able to compete. Any soil maintenance you do will be to stop it from becoming too fertile, mostly by removing all clippings, dead vegetation and fallen leaves from nearby trees.

2. Suppress the grasses Even with poor soil the grasses tend to be the most competitive members of your meadow. Unlike the farmer, however, you want to keep these under control so that your flowers can thrive too. Meadowmat includes grass-suppressing plants like Yellow Rattle, but you can also use carefully timed mowing to help maintain the ideal balance of plants in your meadow.

We're here to help you

We're not just passionate about restoring Britain's essential wild flower meadows; we're dedicated to helping YOU to do it too. So we can provide advice on:

- Type of Meadowmat
- The best location
- Size and shape of meadow
- Installation
- Simple maintenance
- Trouble shooting

So, call us NOW and let's get planning! Alternatively, visit the website to learn more about the different types of Meadowmat and the easy installation and maintenance.

www.meadowmat.com
0800 061 2653

3. Maintain ideal flower conditions As well as reducing soil fertility, you need to create the best all-round environment for your wild flowers. This includes maintaining suitable light or shade and moisture levels, as well as mowing correctly to allow the wild flowers to set their seeds ready for the next growing season.

4. Discourage unwanted species Weeds are the eternal chancers! Create some new growing space and they'll sniff it out and try to take over; and it's no different with a meadow. If you use ready-germinated Meadowmat you prevent this happening, but if you start with seed you will need to be vigilant. And over time, of course, seeds from unwanted plants will be delivered by birds and by the wind, but if your meadow is in good condition they won't pose any serious threat.

5. Encourage a good range of species Although both our Meadowmat roll and our wild flower seeds are carefully designed to provide a rich balance of plants, you may want to add some of your own too. You can sow seed or add plants or bulbs, and the seasonal guide below explains when it's best to do this.

Laying new turf and sowing more seeds

You may want to expand your meadow or patch up small areas. Please refer to the ['Making a Wildflower Meadow'](#) information leaflet to find out how to do this.

How do I cut the meadow?

The most important thing to remember is to remove the clippings when you cut your meadow. This ensures that they don't fertilise the soil and make it too rich for the wild flowers.

Tools

For a small meadow you can simply use a strong pair of garden shears. And for a medium meadow you can use a sharp scythe. For larger areas, however, you might want to use special equipment. If you use a domestic lawn mower it must be able to cut at least 10cm from the ground. Alternatively, as we do at Q Lawns, you can use a machine like the Grillo mower with a collection box.

DO NOT use a strimmer as this will scatter tiny pieces of plant over the area which will break down and add unwanted nutrients to the soil.

When to cut your meadow

The seasonal guide below will help you decide in which month to give your meadow a cut. Whenever you do, choose a dry sunny day and ideally when the forecast predicts a few more dry days ahead. This will help the cuttings to dry faster before you remove them.

How to cut your meadow

Make sure the blade(s) on your shears, scythe or mower are sharp. Cut the grasses and flower stalks about 10cm above the ground. Leave the cuttings lying on top of the meadow for a couple of days to dry out (this makes them easier to remove and allows time for the seeds to drop). You can turn and shake the clippings after a day to help any ripe seeds fall onto the meadow ready to germinate.

Finally, when the cuttings are dry, give them one last shake and then remove them. It makes great hay for small pets but be sure there are no toxic plants in your mix.

After cutting and removing

Depending on the weather your meadow may look sad and bedraggled for a while, but don't worry! As soon as the rain comes the plants will soon recover and green up again. Whatever you do, **DON'T** be tempted to add fertiliser to help it along.

A season by season guide to meadow maintenance

SPRING

Your established meadow doesn't need much attention in Spring.

Mowing: If you feel that your Traditional Meadowmat meadow was too grassy last season or that soil fertility is too high (look out for too much grass and signs that some of the flowers are struggling to compete) then you can mow your meadow in early-to-mid March (see '*How to cut your meadow*'). This is in addition to the regular autumn cut. If you have the Birds and Bees Meadowmat, you should already have cut in late-winter.

Remember to remove the clippings to prevent unwanted soil fertility and to allow sunlight to reach the smaller seedlings. At this time of year the clippings will be short so you don't need to leave them to dry before removing; just use a rake to gently tease them away, being careful not to disturb any young seedlings.

Growing: Allow your meadow to grow freely from March/April, and DON'T add fertiliser or feed of any kind whatsoever.

Sowing: If you want to add some extra seed to your meadow, spring is a good time for sowing annuals like bright blue cornflowers, sunny yellow corn marigolds and bright white corn chamomile. First rake over the area you plan to overseed, removing any debris and scuffing up the surface of the soil a little. Then sprinkle the seeds sparingly onto the bare soil and press them in lightly.

SUMMER

The summer months of June and July see your meadow looking its very best! You can admire the beautiful flowers and the delicate butterflies while being serenaded by the industrious buzzing bees! Meanwhile there is not much work to do – except preparing for the annual cut (see below)!

Mowing: The big annual mow for Traditional Meadowmat is really an autumn job, but sometimes your meadow is ready by late summer - you will know the time has come when you see the grasses turning a honey colour and the flowers turning into seed heads.

You can also mow early if you feel you have too many grasses in your plant mix. Cutting grasses early, while still lush and green, has a much stronger impact although you may have to sacrifice a few late flowers this time round. However, if you have the Birds and Bees Meadowmat, you must delay your annual cut until late winter; the plants have been carefully selected to give you (and the birds) some beautiful seed heads throughout the autumn and into the winter.

Growing: Leave your meadow to grow during May and June and you will be rewarded with a plethora of gorgeous flowers. And don't be tempted to feed them! They'll do fine as they are and won't thank you for enriching the soil. If you spot unwanted plants like nettles or dock, simply pull them out.

If you have a large area you might want to bring out the mower early to cut a path through the meadow. This lets you get up closer to the flowers and the wildlife without crushing them. You can cut your path as low as 5cm but as always remove the clippings! Foraging birds like the blackbird will value the shorter grass, as will low-growing flowers (and their visitors) such as nectar-rich clover, birdsfoot trefoil and common daisy.

Sowing: Wild flower seeds are unlikely to germinate at this time of year, so sowing is not a good idea. You can however lay new Meadowmat turf to fill in or create new areas.

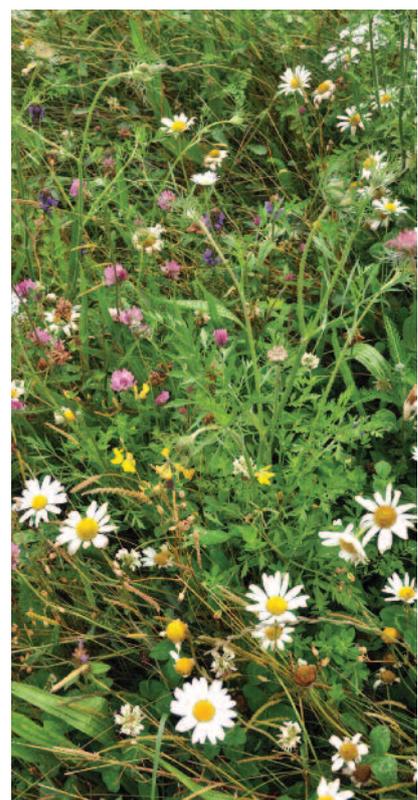
“Spring is nature’s way of saying...
Let’s party!”

Robin Williams



“The hum of bees
is the voice of
the garden.”

Elizabeth Lawrence



AUTUMN

If you have the Birds and Bees Meadowmat – the autumn is simply the time to enjoy watching the wildlife visit the wonderful seed heads; you can also do some amazing photography when the first frosts appear!

But if you have the Traditional Meadowmat, autumn is an important house-keeping time, preparing for the following year. In days gone by this is when the cattle would have been grazing on the golden grass. Assuming you don't have cattle, the biggest job is the mowing (if you haven't already done this), along with managing the species of plants in your meadow and preventing the soil from becoming too fertile.

Mowing: This is the main cutting time for Traditional Meadowmat (but remember to leave the Birds and Bees variety until late winter). Exactly when you do it will depend on our increasingly changeable weather, but once your seed heads are well established, you can mow your meadow. Aim for a cutting height of no less than 10cm and remember to remove the cuttings once dry (see 'How to cut your meadow'). You may find you need to do a second cut later in the autumn if the grasses grow back too vigorously.

You also need to be vigilant and remove falling leaves from nearby trees and bushes before they begin breaking down and feeding the soil. If you have a grass box on your mower, you can gather them this way and deposit the finely-cut leaves in your compost.

Growing: Once you have cut your meadow, just leave it to begin growing back. DON'T feed it!

Sowing: Autumn is the best time of year to lay new turf as it can then establish during the winter. You can also sow seeds; some varieties will germinate within a few weeks while others (like yellow rattle, very useful for suppressing over-enthusiastic grasses) need to rest in the soil until the frosts awaken them and give you springtime seedlings. See 'Spring' for advice on how to sow. You can also carefully add adult plants and set bulbs now to overwinter in the soil.

WINTER

During winter your meadow simply looks after itself, leaving you with little or nothing to do.

Mowing: For Traditional Meadowmat you will already have cut your meadow in the autumn. However, if the winter is mild and the grasses keep growing you can mow again; just remember to keep a height of 10-15 cm and don't scalp the plants – and always remove the cuttings before they feed the soil!

For Birds and Bees Meadowmat, late winter (February-March) is the time for your big mow. Your aim is to clear whatever is dead and decaying and leave room for the emerging plants and new seedlings to enjoy the sunshine. Cut back your meadow to 10cm, and remove the clippings and any dead vegetation.

Growing: You won't see much growth during the winter; some plants may even disappear altogether! Don't worry – there's plenty going on underground as the roots and then shoots get ready for their spring burst.

Sowing: Winter is not a good time to sow seeds but you can lay new Meadowmat as long as the ground isn't frozen.

“Autumn is the hush before winter”

French proverb



“If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant”

Anne Bradstreet

