

Exeter meadows

Frequently Asked Questions



Background

Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) and Exeter City Council (ECC) have been working together for 10 years developing meadows across the city as part of the 'Exeter Wild City' project. Many schools and community groups have been involved in sowing meadows and the initiative has received huge public support. Meadows have included showy high profile locations such as Paris Street roundabout, reduced cuts along tree drip lines in city parks and a mix of the two approaches along road verges. The partnership is now looking at ways to make meadow development more sustainable, less labour intensive and better connected to create a city wide nature network. Roads across the city have been identified where verges could provide corridors between greenspaces. In 2022 we are trialling meadow management techniques along Topsham Road and working with partners and residents to provide a linear meadow. Hopefully what we learn over the course of the year will help us to replicate the work along other roadside corridors around the city in years to come.

What seed mix is being used?

Mixes have been varied and include cornflower annuals, low growing mixes, clay specific mixes and long season mixes. Yellow rattle has also been sown in various places to reduce competition from more dominant grasses.

Why aren't meadows sown with only native seed mixes?

Non-native species have been sown in Exeter, including cosmos. Sowing non-natives is not always appropriate, however, in an urban setting there is a place for sowing such mixes. Non-native flowers often provide a longer flowering season. This provides a huge advantage to some insects and bumblebees who are starting to hibernate later in the year (or not at all in the South West) due to our warming winter weather. The vast variety of plants found in urban gardens has been shown to hugely benefit such bees, therefore expanding this to meadow corridors in urban environments is wholly appropriate and advantageous to our native wildlife. It is worth stating that invasive non-natives such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam are not appropriate in any setting. In 2022 we are using mixes with grass seed and perennial species. This will help to shift meadows away from annual seeding and towards more natural meadow management.

Isn't there enough habitat in the countryside, why are we doing this in an urban environment?

Nature is in desperate need of help in both urban and rural settings. Meadows alone have all but disappeared across the UK since the 1940s. 41% of our insects are facing extinction. Urban habitats such as gardens, allotments and parks often provide more varied feeding opportunities and a longer feeding season for wildlife than may be found in more natural settings. For example, bumblebees will find a greater variety of flowering plants that flower earlier in the year and later into the autumn; and garden birds are being fed seed all year round ensuring their survival over winter. This has shown that some species have healthier populations in urban settings than in rural settings. Supporting wildlife not only helps species that are declining nationwide, but it is of huge benefit to humans as well. Greener urban landscapes have a positive impact on people's health and wellbeing, inspire community cohesion and provide benefits such as reduced flooding, pollination of food, cooling street temperatures and storing carbon.

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I don't like verges left uncut, it looks messy. Can we return to regularly cut verges please?

At the end of the flowering season meadows do start to droop before they are cut back. Even in this phase they are incredibly valuable to wildlife as a place to hide and even hibernate if left over winter. Some city meadows will be cut back before the winter.

Exeter's meadows have become an important part of the city's fabric. It's a habitat that has sprung up in most urban settings around the UK and is hugely important in helping to tackle declining wildlife. The meadows that have developed over the last decade have instigated public conversation around the pollinator crisis and how we can all help take action for insects.

Is the council reducing its use of glyphosate around the city?

Exeter City Council are looking into alternative methods and trialling changes to existing glyphosate use. Highway, parks and playground use has been reduced and alternative weed control methods have begun including mechanical weed pulling and deep clean teams. We are continuing to work with Exeter City Council to phase out the use of harmful pesticides.

What are the top 4 things I can do in my garden to help wildlife?

Put in a small pond, leave an area of grass uncut between April-August, plant some nectar rich plants and ensure that hedgehogs can access your garden. More information, instructions and species lists can be found on Devon Wildlife Trust's gardening for wildlife pages. As part of the Exeter Wild City initiative, residents of Exeter can apply for a Wildlife Garden Award if they are providing habitat for wildlife.

What opportunities exist in Exeter to get involved in conservation?

- [Exeter Wildlife Garden Award](#)
- [Help a Hog campaign](#)
- Attend [Exeter Local Group](#) events and/or join the group to help organise more activities
- Join the Exeter Wild City [Facebook page](#) to share projects, ideas, photos and questions
- Keep an eye on DWT led events, volunteering opportunities and campaigns on the DWT website and Exeter Wild City Facebook group
- Join your local community group to help bring about action for people and wildlife

I don't live on Topsham Road – does this mean I/my community project can't be involved in Exeter Wild City?

Not at all. Exeter Wild City supports community initiatives, they are hugely important to the rich tapestry of habitat provision across the city. Where there is capacity DWT staff are on hand to provide advice to initiatives across the city and there are ways of getting involved listed above. As we trial and develop wildlife corridors across the city there may be offers such as wildflower seed that will be focused on residents along identified routes.

Can you recommend a wildflower seed supplier?

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There are a huge number of garden centres and websites that provide wildflower seed. Here are just a couple of suppliers that provide good advice and support:

- Goren Farm (locally sourced seed)
- Emorsgate Seed
- Bright Seeds