

Green Musings From the Grange – winter 2017/18

Government going green!

The government says it will design a scheme to support almost any landowner in “planting woodland, providing new habitats for wildlife, increasing biodiversity, contributing to improved water quality and returning cultivated land to wildflower meadows or other more natural states”.

Whether this happens or not we, at Grange Lane Allotments, have the chance to do some of this ourselves. What do you think about these ideas?



Meadow Heaven

For a start we could cut back on mowing any areas except the paths on the site. This was mooted at the AGM in November and not will only save time and petrol but also will be the start of us being able to nurture some of our lovely hillside back to a wild state – and hopefully provide habitat and forage for insects, reptiles and animals alike.

The first year we could just see what comes up – continue mowing the paths through the area – but take note of what flowers and grasses abound in the area we will leave unmown.

A traditional meadow is cut – or grazed - only three times in a year. Ideally a scythe should be used as it leaves the grass long enough to still provide habitat for

invertebrates/insects and so help the bat/bird/small mammal/slow worm chain to flourish.



Summer hay cut

The main cut each year for a meadow is the summer "hay cut". This is when the main part of the year's growth is cut back using a scythe or suitable mower (lawn mowers are generally not up to this task). The growth should be cut back to a height of 40-75mm.

The cut grass should be dried on site, turning it to assist drying and disperse seeds (this also significantly reduces the weight and bulk of material to be removed). The dried 'hay' should be removed within 7 days of cutting. Where hay making is impractical, it can be composted or placed in heaps on unused parts of a site, where if you are very lucky they could provide habitat for breeding grass snakes!

Scything is good exercise for those wishing to build their fitness and is probably no more tiring than operating a heavy, noisy and vibrating machine.

Next course in Dorset on 19th and 20th May – any takers?

<http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/courses.html>



Transition from grass to meadow

Grasses can be very vigorous and will out-compete wild flowers on established grassland. This vigour can be reduced by introducing semi-parasitic plants such as *Rhinanthus* species (rattle)



Euphrasia species (eyebright) and *Pedicularis palustris* and *P. sylvatica* (lousewort).

The most useful is *Rhinanthus minor* (yellow rattle). In late summer or autumn seed it is broadcast onto grass that has been cut short. It is an annual and can be eliminated from grassland in one year if prevented from seeding by cutting.



More musings in the spring!

Rix Pyke