

Hagge Woods Trust

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How To ... Create A Wood-Meadow

*N.B. The following is based on the experience at Three Haggas Wood-Meadow where we began with an ex-arable field. If you are **not** starting with a bare site, we recommend you first assess carefully what plants are there, seeking professional advice if you are not sure, eg should you have unrestored grassland you would not want to disturb the sward.*

- **Grant - Apply for Countryside Stewardship, Higher Tier, Woodland Creation Grant, if appropriate. Minimum area is 3ha total in blocks of *min* 0.5ha, for grant.**
- **Open Ground - Maximum is now 20%, but for the spreadsheet example, we have added 1ha of Stewardship, Creation of Species Rich Grassland GS8, to the 3ha of woodland planting to increase Open Ground (OG) to 40%. If planting without a grant, then opt for eg. 40% OG.**
- **Plan to allow maximum wood edge effect, with rides and glades.**
- **Spray (or burn if organic?) - the whole area off with roundup, to reduce weed burden.**
- **Cultivate & Spray Stale Seedbed - Allow min. 4 weeks. Cultivate (plough, harrow, roll) the whole area to create a fine seedbed; allow a flush of weeds (3-4 weeks approx.); then spray with roundup again, and repeat if necessary.**
- **Seed Mix — Take a soil sample and consider soil type when choosing seed. Low phosphorous levels best for meadow establishment. To keep cost down, broadcast the whole area with fine grasses, and, using a GPS tractor, wildflowers only in the OG areas. This may also reduce strangling effect of eg vetch on baby trees. Alternatively, flowers, carefully selected, over the whole area provides 100% habitat till canopy closes. Good quality green hay could also be considered.**
- **Seed Rate — 15-20kg/ha fine grasses, with as high a percentage of wildflowers as affordable.**
- **Broadcast - with a fine grasses and wildflower mix, without any further cultivation, and roll in, ideally in the autumn, but otherwise in spring. Consider slug control.**
- **Establish 'meadow' by cutting at least three times in the first season and then plant trees. This may require waiting a year longer, where the original weed burden is high.**
- **Native Trees & Shrubs - Plant a wide variety, with shrubs at ride and glade edges. Larger transplants (60/90cm) will be less swamped by strong vegetation growth. Oaks don't thrive if 'crown' is covered.**
- **Fencing - Consider deer fencing if you have a large square site. Tubes may be more cost effective.**
- **Planting Pattern — plant in lazy S rows, to prevent straight line effect, but still allow easy maintenance between the rows. Use coloured canes to highlight rows. We marked rows**

with a 'sports field' white liner, or mark with mower. Adopt regular spacing between rows, but vary spacing along row. Consider coppice coups; evergreens as way markers; future veteran trees.

- **Protection, care** — Consider 35cm+ vole guards if you haven't used tree tubes; also mycorrhizal fungi to roots.
- **Stocking density** - As per FC grant. For example, 3m wide rows, with av 2.5m between plants within rows is 1,333/ha. Closer spacing within rows for eg oaks, and shrubs on coup edges, will increase stocking density, and beneficial for timber production or edge effect. Best consider intended use/product to guide you.
- **Meadow Management** — once established, cut annually for hay (3-5 times in year one.) If too much grass, cut and remove twice annually. Consider grazing, using elex fencing to control livestock.
- **Between the Rows** — the most difficult area to manage, depends on equipment and labour resources. We brushcut in winter, leaving arisings to increase organic matter (but not fertility). Ideal may be to also cut in summer and remove clippings, leaving every other row to ensure invertebrates have continuous habitat. Then cut the alternative row a few weeks later. If you have resources, and trees are getting swamped, scythe or tread down vegetation round trees.
- **Weed Control** — Timely and consistent is key. Remove docks, ragwort, nettles, and thistles by hand before seed sets, or spot spray in early spring with roundup, eg. using a drinks bottle with a sponge in the top. We avoided spraying around each tree: it may enhance tree growth, but would provide bare land for weeds to establish in. Few vigorous weeds will appear if the sward is established.
- **Yellow Rattle** — a hemiparasite that reduces vigour of grasses in particular. An annual plant, which needs winter cold to germinate, should therefore be sown in the autumn, in contact with the soil. You can harvest your own seed, once established.

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