

Obtaining native seed

ADVISORY NOTE



Restored native limestone grassland from wild-origin seed, North Somerset

Photo: Sue Everett

These guidelines are appropriate for the restoration of native grassland communities that were once widespread in the agricultural landscapes of Britain and Ireland. The restored grasslands will be managed by livestock grazing and by mowing for hay.

For other projects where the objective is to create attractive “amenity” wildflower grassland (rather than restore native plant communities) less stringent guidelines over seed origin can be applied. Nevertheless, the seed origin of wild flowers and the scarcer grasses should be from the same country. Within ecologically sensitive areas, such as the Yorkshire Dales, the seed origin should be from within the same natural area unless it is an amenity grassland created in an urban area or garden.

Principles

- ✿ Ensure that the person who specifies the seed or plant source is knowledgeable about wild flora.
- ✿ Organise your seed order well ahead of planting time.
- ✿ Use only source-identified seed of native or wild origin to the region or locality of planting.
- ✿ Sow only species that are characteristic of the community to be restored and the locality.
- ✿ Include Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) in crop-grown seed mixes for neutral and calcareous grasslands.

Origin is the place in the wild from which the original seeds or plants were collected. This is not to be confused with provenance, which is often the location of the nursery where seeds are produced or plants grown.

Bringing back the meadows



Obtaining native seed

- ✿ Ideally use a seed mixture or hay, wild-harvested from a species-rich “donor site” in the project region.
- ✿ Do not use agricultural cultivars of grasses or wild flowers that have been developed for forage production as they may either dominate or disappear after a few years.

Using wild-harvested seed from an existing species-rich grassland

- ✿ Guaranteed known origin.
- ✿ Cheaper than crop-grown seed.
- ✿ Contract-harvesting can be a relatively cheap method for obtaining seed (£100–£200 per ha sown, depending on the harvesting method used).
- ✿ See *Flora locale*'s website for the advisory notes on brush-harvesting, forage-harvesting and green hay¹.
- ✿ The donor site should be chosen to match the receptor site (similar soil and geology, within the same local climatic region or natural area).
- ✿ Some species characteristic to the donor site may not be present in the harvested mixture if they flower early or late. These species can be harvested by hand and added to the mix or broadcast on the receptor site when seed is available².



A crop of known-origin Betony produced to sell as a single species and to add to seed mixtures

Buying seed or plants

- ✿ Order seed from a specialist native flora grower (see the list of suppliers at www.floralocale.org).
- ✿ ALWAYS ask for source-identification evidence of seed ORIGIN; suppliers should know the county of origin for all the native species they sell.
- ✿ DO NOT purchase crop-grown seed mixtures containing Perennial Rye-grass, Cocksfoot, False Oat-grass, Chewings Fescue³, Highland Bent or cultivars of Meadow Fescue. (There will usually be a small quantity of native Rye-grass, Cocksfoot and False Oat-grass in wild-harvested seed mixes).
- ✿ Have mixtures made to your requirements; grasses should be principally fine-leaved species (e.g. Crested Dog's-tail, Small Timothy, Common Bent) with small quantities of Sweet Vernal-grass, Creeping Red Fescue, Meadow Foxtail, Meadow Oat-grass, Quaking Grass, Meadow Barley and Yellow Oat-grass if available⁴.



Wild-harvested seed from a lowland meadow

- 1 Contact *Flora locale* for advice on how to find a donor site or someone who can help you.
- 2 Crop-grown wildflower seed of regional origin (e.g. South-east England) may be available from a restricted number of suppliers.
- 3 This species is suitable for amenity grasslands.
- 4 The mix will need to be designed to suit the locality and grassland type to be restored. For example, mixes for lowland chalk grasslands should include Upright Brome and Sheep's Fescue.

For further advisory notes, case studies, Guidelines for planting projects in the countryside, training opportunities and suppliers of native flora, go to www.floralocale.org



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