



Growing instructions for the pure Bird/Butterfly/Bee mix

Congratulations on your purchase of the native-Irish-origin wild flower seed mix.

By buying, sowing, growing and caring for native flowers you are directly helping many different kinds of insects in your area and it follows the birds and other animals who rely upon insects as a food source.

We want you to get the most from your seeds. Mixes are intended to be direct sown. For the grower this can be a challenge. You will have to beat the weeds, particularly grass, you'll be watching out for slugs and you'll be keeping mice and birds off the seeds. But not to worry, with care and attention you can do it!

Seed bed preparation

It's something of a myth that wild flowers prefer impoverished conditions, they need nutrients, light and water, just like any other plant. What wild flowers really dislike is competition for the above; given a choice they do better without competition; and most of the competition struggle more than wild flowers in impoverished places.

If you want really great wild flower plants, then give them nutrients, light, water and space.

Seeds are tiny, so it makes sense to give them really fine soil to nestle into, then they're not struggling past clumps and stones when they're tiny. You'll have to work that soil, dig it over, pull out the seeds, make a stale seed bed (dig it over and leave for a few weeks then kill the weed seeds that came up) if it's new ground and when that's finally done, clumps broken up, stones removed, finish it with a fine soil rake. It's a bit like decorating, it's all in the preparation.

Then make sure your seed bed is properly moist (not soggy either though), preferably with a fine spray for some time, so that it's not just the surface that's moist, dig in and have a good look, if it's dry below keep watering gently. In sun and wind, top moisture can evaporate quickly, if your seed bed dries out it's very sad news for seeds and seedlings.

Sowing

Sow the seeds evenly into your area. You can mix the seeds with some sand to help you measure it out. It can be helpful to divide up your area and divide up your seed mix, minimising bare patches.

You're looking to sow the seeds on the surface; bury them too deep and they won't have the energy to come up, especially the smaller ones.

Conversely and confusingly, if you leave the seeds perched on the surface birds and mice will have a field day (maybe that's where the saying comes from), plus they're in danger of drying out in the sun, which will kill even the hardiest seeds.

Seeds need good contact with the soil to begin to take up moisture - more on bedding in the seed in a sec.

To broadcast your seeds, (you can practice with sand first on another area to see you get an even spread) just hold some seed in your hand and with a swinging/spreading motion of your arm and wrist let them go. It's an old seed sowers art, farmers used to bring in professional seed sowers to sow their fields, so think of it as an old practice you're reviving.

Sand in your seed mix can also help you see where you've sown helping you fill in any bare patches.



Bedding in the seed

Once you're finished broadcasting you need to get the seeds in good contact with the soil. If you have a roller that's perfect use that. Failing that, a good old fashioned trample with a gardeners boot can also provide the solution. You're not looking to compact the soil too much, just good firm contact, the seeds pressed into the moist soil.

Now you must wait

But there's a few things you can do to help your seeds. Anyone who's sown a lawn knows how pesky the birds can be, you might have your own solution for that.

Another solution for a small area is to cover with special horticultural fleece, which can also help keep the cat/dog/kids/granny off. Once the seedlings start to emerge you'll need to remove it, especially in a wind, where the fleece flapping about might break the seedlings.

If the weather gives dry you'll need to water before it gets too dry, the same fine spray as before is good, so that seedlings aren't dislodged by large water droplets.

For larger areas where watering is not possible try to sow in damp weather conditions and avoid sowing before heatwaves or big storms.

Erratic germination is nature's way of ensuring at least some seedlings survive, it is normal and bare patches should fill in by summer.

We hope you enjoy your wild flower bed. All the seeds are native and should do well in average conditions. You can allow your seeds to fall naturally and replenish your patch, or..

Collecting the seed

If you want to collect your own seed, keep an eye on the flowers after pollination has occurred. Seeds will form within around 4-6 weeks after the flower has died back. You'll know when they're ready to harvest as they come off the seed head easily with a gentle brush of your thumb. This is known as the "point of natural dispersal".

Collect into a cloth or paper bag, leave somewhere dry and airy but out of direct sunlight for two weeks, this allows the seed coat to fully mature which gives the seed better storage longevity.

On a dry warm day in mid afternoon store your seeds in a dry airtight mouse proof container with a label (you'll be astonished at how you forget, or perhaps like me you're no longer astonished at how shocking your memory is ;) and keep cool and dry until next year. You can open your seeds over winter on a dry day and check for infestation/mould.

As the seed is an F1 generation, they belong to you, so you can regrow, give away or sell as you see fit.

Maintaining the site

Once the flowers have done their seeding you can tidy up a bit, a nice job for a dry December day, cut off the old dead stalks and take away and remove any persistent weeds, notably grass and docks.

You can add other species as time goes by, take others out, play with it, have fun. The more attention you give it, the better it will be 😊

We'd love to hear how you get on and if you would like to send in any photos just use the email address below.