
SOURCES

Where the Wild Things Are by Stephen Anderton,
Gardens Nov 2003

Strewing Green Hay by Peter Millet, British Wildlife Oct 2003

Creating Wild Flower Meadows by Ian Trueman

Countryside Stewardship Management Guidance, Defra 2002

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Parish Grasslands Project HT05 Feb/2005



St Briavels, Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Grasslands Project

Enhancing your Grassland

**A guide to using green hay to
supplement the wild flowers in
managed grassland**

In the parishes of St. Briavels, Hewelsfield & Brockweir, we are fortunate to have retained sufficient areas of semi-natural grassland to allow natural recolonisation to occur from nearby fields by the spread of wild flower and meadow grass seeds.

However, allowing grassland to recolonise naturally may take 5-10 years for it to become visually attractive and of nature conservation value. This leaflet explains how to give nature a helping hand by spreading green hay from local flower-rich fields.

Whether you're creating new flowery grassland or hoping to increase the number of plant species in existing grassland, the best - and cheapest - way to obtain native seed is by strewing freshly cut hay from local flower-rich fields.

Some points to bear in mind:

- ◆ Wild flowers and fine meadow grasses do not thrive in soil that has been fertilised and they don't compete well with vigorous plants like perennial rye-grass. Reducing the fertility of the soil will significantly reduce the growth of dominant grasses and give the wild flowers an opportunity to establish themselves. You can achieve this by spending a few seasons cutting the grass for hay and removing it, followed by light grazing of the aftermath (regrowth). Sowing yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) can also reduce sward productivity because it inhibits the growth of the surrounding grass species. Experience has shown that it is easy to establish locally¹, with seed pods readily available from many PGP members.
- ◆ Freshly cut (green) hay gives better results than dried hay in terms of the quantity and species diversity of seed transferred; it is also proving to be a good way of distributing orchids which have very fine seed. It is important to cut the hay after the seeds have set. If the cut is too early the seeds have not formed, and if it is too late you miss the seeds of early flowering plants - like orchids - which have already been shed. Keep a close check on the source site. If you're interested in early and late flowering species, consider taking a later cut from a second site.
- ◆ ***It is vital to strew green hay quickly after cutting.*** If it is left in bales or in a heap it will heat up rapidly and the high temperatures will damage and even kill the seeds.

¹ See PGP newsletter issue 9

STREWING GREEN HAY

Receiver site: Record the species present before work starts.

Source site: Choose a species rich site (the PGP can advise on this). You only require hay from an area half the size of the receiver site. (Defra's guidance is to spread green hay at a rate of 0.25 tons per hectare.)

Preparing the receiver site: Graze the land hard to achieve an average sward height of 25-50 mm (1-2 inches). If no stock are available, cut and remove existing vegetation. Do not cultivate (it releases fertility).

Extracting hay: Check on source site with manager and select date (after mid-July – early September depending on the species that interest you). Cut, transport and spread on the same day.

Spreading hay: Unroll bales and hand spread with a pitchfork or garden fork. Use a forage harvester for large fields. The hay must be spread thinly to ensure that the grass underneath isn't poached i.e. that it doesn't go yellow and die back. Allow stock in to feed on it immediately. Where stock are not available turn the hay after 36 hours and remove any matted remains within 1 week to prevent smothering the seedlings and to help shake out the seeds.

Initial management: Some vegetation will develop during the autumn so do not over winter animals. Monitor the site during the following season and keep a record of the species. Make hay in late July and aftermath graze.

Continuous management: Continue to use as a hay meadow² with aftermath grazing. If unsuitable for hay, use for light grazing³ except from April to August until plants get established.

² See PGP leaflet HT01 *Hay Meadows*

³ See PGP leaflet HT03 *Pasture*