

Management of Churchyard Grassland for Conservation

Grassland can be managed by grazing, cutting or burning.

In gardens, churchyards and public-open spaces cutting is usually the method used for the management of grassland.

Improving the care of grassland for conservation may only mean a slight change in cutting times and methods.

Firstly, to establish the cutting regime for grassy areas the types of plants that make up the grassland need to be identified.

It is only recommended to leave grass to grow on and flower and set seed where there is:

- A diversity of flowers and grasses or an area is to be left for other conservation reasons. eg small mammals or insects.
- There are no visited graves.
- There is the interest from people to cut and rake up the cuttings at the right time.



You may wish to start with changes to the cutting regime in an area away from the main entrance. The trial "patch" can always be extended in future years.

Simple Steps to the care of grassland for conservation

Advantages of an annual cutting regime

- May save time and money
- Allows the beauty of flower rich grassland and the animal life it supports to be seen and enjoyed
- Allows the wild flowers to set seed and increase
- Very good for wildlife, especially butterflies and other insects
- Demonstrates a care for the natural world.

Step by Step Guide

Step 1

Identify as many plants, that is, grasses and flowers, as you can and make a list. Use a wildflower guidebook and a magnifying lens if you need a closer look. See list of books and suppliers.



The following table shows those wildflowers with flowering times, which indicate a grassy area worthy of special care.

Flowering Periods of typical grassland plants

Species	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV
Lesser Celandine	█	█	█	█					
Primrose	█	█	█	█					
Cowslip		█	█	█					
Meadow Saxifrage		█	█	█	█				
Germander Speedwell		█	█	█	█				
Bulbous Buttercup		█	█	█	█				
Bugle		█	█	█	█				
Bush Vetch		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Pignut			█	█	█				
Sorrel			█	█	█	█			
Meadow Vetchling			█	█	█	█	█		
Bird's foot trefoil			█	█	█	█	█		
Lesser stitchwort			█	█	█	█	█	█	
Ox-eye daisy			█	█	█	█	█	█	
Burnet Saxifrage			█	█	█	█	█	█	
Mouse-eared hawkweed			█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Lady's bedstraw				█	█	█	█	█	
Meadow Cranesbill				█	█	█	█	█	
Knapweed				█	█	█	█	█	
Betony				█	█	█	█	█	
Field scabious				█	█	█	█	█	
Devil's bit scabious			█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Self-heal				█	█	█	█	█	█
Harebell					█	█	█	█	

Step 2

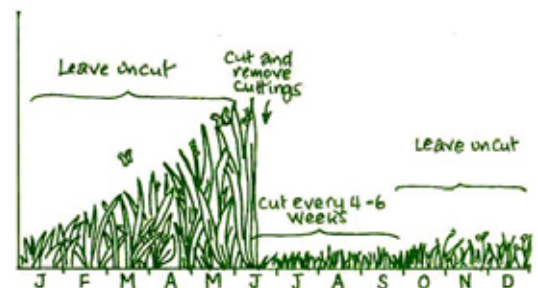
After identifying the flowers that are present then decide which cutting regime from those described below best suits your type of grassland.

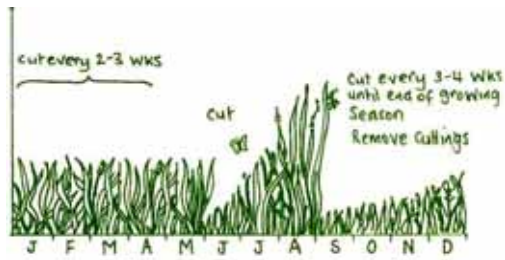
Different groups of flowers require different cutting times and the pictures and accompanying descriptions describe when to do any cutting.



Spring flowering grassland

To enjoy certain spring flowers do not cut until you are sure the flowers have set seed. A cut may be done early, say in February, in some cases. Cutting depends on the season and the weather conditions but a spring meadow should be cut by late June. Then every four weeks until the end of the season to discourage coarse grasses.





Summer flowering grassland

To enjoy summer flowering plants cut at least once, preferably more, before the end of May. Leave uncut at least until the end of July (8 to 10 weeks). Then cut every 4 weeks, if man-power permits, until the end of the season to discourage coarse grasses.

Spring and summer flowers grassland

It is quite likely that both spring and summer flowers exist in the grassland. In this case careful consideration should be given to the cutting regime. To enjoy both groups then leave the cutting until the summer flowers have set seed. Although an early cut may be possible (February) with a second cut after the end of June. Remember – to avoid the build up of coarse grasses and invasive species the cutting gaps should be no more than 12 weeks. Not all churchyard management groups can cut as often as is recommended so it should be realised that coarse grass may thrive if cutting does not reduce its vigour.

Late summer flowering grassland

Some flowers do not set seed until late summer. Devil's bit scabious flowers as late as September. Should there be late flowers of special note then cutting may be done around them, leaving the flowers as islands amongst cut grass. Cut when the flowers have set seed.

Unmanaged grassland with tall grass is good for insects, butterflies and small mammals. It is recommended that these areas, which may be left around the very edges (margins) of the churchyard, be cut at least once a year. To benefit butterflies and insects cut in July. To benefit amphibians and slow worms cut once in October to a height of 4" (10 to 12cms)

If the grassland contains weeds such as docks or thistles then cut before they flower and about a month afterwards. Pull plants such as ragwort by hand.



Yorkshire fog

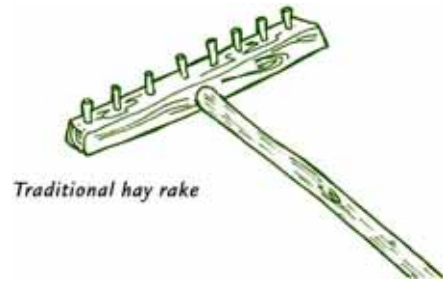
Disturbed ground/bare soil. These can be very good areas for insects and for colonising by wildflowers from the surrounding areas.

Did you know?

- There is a wide range of different types of grassland in Britain.
- The grassland types depend on the type of soil and whether the soil is wet or dry.
- A meadow is cut in the growing season and may be grazed afterwards whilst a pasture is open for grazing all year round.
- A mosaic of different lengths of grassland benefits wildlife.
- Long grass provides shelter for small mammals, and is good for insects, butterflies.

Here are a few tips to help with grassland care.

- Always rake off and remove cuttings.
- Seasons vary so adjust cutting regime accordingly.
- Be aware of changes to species within the grassland via monitoring.
- Cut path edges to about 1 metre for a tidy appearance.
- Always use the correct machinery and tools, being aware of Health and Safety.
- Putting a temporary fence, such as post and line marking out the areas of grass to be left uncut may help delineate the area.
- Erect a simple sign indicating that the grassland is a conservation area.



Please

Send your survey results/plan to:
Caring for God's Acre or your local county wildlife trust

Contact CFGA for help with any of the following:

Identification of grassland plants
Details of an appropriate cutting regime
Grant advice



Books

The Wild Flower Key, F. Rose Warne

The Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe, Fitter, Fitter and Blamey. Collins

Grasses, CE Hubbard. Pelican

Grasses, Sedges and Rushes, Fitter, Fitter and Farrer. Collins

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