

Guidance on Bookham 'Blue Heart' residential verges



We want our verges to become stunning new wild flower meadows and havens for wildlife, full of pollinators like bees, butterflies and other insects. You and your children will hopefully get much joy from watching the flowers and their 'visitors'.

To gain buy-in from other residents we need them to look good and 'cared for'. We can achieve this by attention to which plants occur naturally once mowing is reduced, and possibly with some supplemental sowing and/or planting to increase diversity.

Similar considerations apply to leaving some grass in your garden to grow long and support wildflowers.

- Our Blue Heart project encourages **native wild flowers**
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/pdf/conservation-and-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators-wildflowers.pdf>
 - Please do not upset the balance of an established patch of wildflowers. In particular, please don't plant anything too vigorous which will swamp what's already there. There's plenty of information to be found online and in books on what's invasive and what's not.
- 'Pretty' pollinator-friendly mixes of garden flowers
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/pdf/conservation-and-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators-garden-plants.pdf> still have a valuable role to play in your garden – hopefully you are already providing some of these without maybe realising it! These mixes are best kept away from verges as they may contain non-native varieties.

Starting off

- In early spring, unless bulbs are already coming up, give the verge a quick mow with a high setting. Any cuttings to be collected (or raked off) and any dead grass or 'thatch' should be raked off.
- Check for signs of any plants coming up already. Around Bookham you may well see some early primroses and even orchids which have been given a chance to grow by not mowing.
- Put up your **Blue Heart(s)** to show what you're doing and to alert the council mowing contractors not to mow until the end of the season – *see also below*.
- More plants will show up over time. They may have been waiting low to the ground for their chance to grow and flower. Perhaps you already have an idea of what's there? Don't rush to supplement before you've seen what comes up naturally. Species like knapweed, ox eye daisies and birds foot trefoil are common as well as beautiful.
- If nothing much comes up you may wish to make the verge more interesting by
 - **Sowing a wild flower seed mix**
 - If you're planning to use seed, you need to expose bare soil, so scarify or rake first, or even dig over a bit. Take out existing grass if possible. There are some mixes

better suited to growing in grass but even they need some bare soil to germinate. Seed suppliers will provide further guidance on this.

- You need to use a mix which includes *yellow rattle* or get some separate seeds of this. This feeds off grass roots and stops it getting too vigorous and overwhelming your wild flowers.
- We don't recommend trying to sow direct on grass as it's really hard to see what's happening, if anything, and we haven't had much success. Of course plants in the wild will self seed but it's not a reliable method of establishing plants for the first time.
- ***Remember to keep watering till the seedlings are established.***
- Similarly you could **supplement with plug plants**, small plants which you then grow on in your verge. You may even find small plants of suitable species in your own garden to transplant. You should also include yellow rattle as above; plugs of these become available in April each year.
 - If possible grow on the plug plants a bit in a pots of garden soil (not compost) to give them a good start.
- Both plugs and seeds of native wildflowers are available from
 - Landlife Wildflowers <https://www.wildflower.co.uk/>
 - Meadowmania <https://www.meadowmania.co.uk/>
 - Boston Seeds <https://www.bostonseeds.com/>

and their catalogues have lots of useful information. You can buy single varieties or mixtures.

- **For both seeds and plugs**, choose them to be suitable for your soil type (e.g. there are chalk-specific mixes and plants), whether the grass is particularly dry or wet, and whether the area tends to shade. Most wild flowers like sunshine but there are options for shady areas.
 - **Annuals** will come up the first year if you sow early enough in spring. They are not likely to seed on grass so won't come again.
 - **Perennials** will flower year after year – once they get going they'll keep coming back and should multiply.
- **Watering** - remember to keep them watered in dry weather till established.
- **Mowing** - leave a 30 cm wide unplanted border around your verge, especially alongside the road, and maybe mow it to show you're caring for the verge, not leaving it to grow totally wild – this is called 'framing'.

Ongoing maintenance during the flowering season

Not a lot! Just keep watered and framed as necessary.

Enjoy the result!

- Have fun seeing what comes up and maybe get your children or grandchildren involved with counting how many different plants they can see
- Identify them with an App, book or knowledgeable friend.

- Find out more about the pollinators which visit each type of plant.

End of season mowing

- You could leave this to the council, or if a smallish area keep control and mow it yourself!
- The principle here is to allow the flowers to seed but then mow to avoid the grass getting too vigorous and dominating the wildflowers.
- The cuttings need to be collected and removed. A build-up of a thick 'thatch' of dead and dying grass and other vegetation can form a mat over the soil. This encourages the growth of more vigorous dominant species that don't rely on open soil for seed to germinate, as many of our wild flowers do.
- Put the cuttings in your council garden waste bin or make a pile of it to rot down.
- Typically you should look at mowing in say late September, but if there are late flowering species on your verge, you may need to wait till October.

Second year

- Sit back and enjoy!
- If the grass has grown since the autumn cut, you may wish to do a 'high' March mow before anything comes up. Otherwise just rake off any leaves and other debris and wait.

*** Remember to take photos as your verge develops and send them to us to put on our Facebook page ***

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