



Photo: Tony Marshall

Managing your hay meadow

Early spring:

The cycle of the hay meadow begins. Stock may still be grazing on the meadow.

Early May:

The meadow is 'shut up', stock is removed. This allows the hay crop to grow and waders to display over and nest in the growing sward.



Photo: Alison Thwaites

Winter or spring:

A light dressing of farmyard manure is applied. No chemical fertilisers are applied. Occasionally apply lime if the pH drops below 5.5.

June/July:

This is the main flowering period of the meadow. Earlier plants include oxeye daisy, yellow rattle and red clover, followed by later species like great burnet and knapweed.



Photo: Michelle Waller



Photo: Claire Cornish

Winter:

Livestock may stay on the meadow. The sward should be grazed to no less than 3cm. This helps seeds to germinate and gives light to newly emerging seedlings.

Plants must be allowed to set seed and ground nesting birds such as curlew allowed to successfully fledge their young.



Photo: Paul Arkle



Photo: Bunty Wright

The newly mown meadow looks bare. The meadow can be grazed by cattle or sheep. They keep the sward low, disturb the ground with their hooves and create space for new seeds to germinate.

A year in the life of a hay meadow

The hay is turned and dried over 3-5 days allowing more seeds to be shed. The hay is baled and removed from the field and stored to be used as winter feed.

Late July:

The hay is cut once all plants have set seed. The time of the cut depends on agri-environment scheme options, farming preferences, and of course the weather.



Photo: Kath Birkinshaw



Meadow Life

Cumbria's hay meadow project



www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

Restoring and managing your hay meadow



Photo: Haytime Project



Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

Cumbria's hay meadow project

Meadow Life

For further information, please contact the Meadow Life project at:

Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Plumgarths, Crook Road, Kendal LA8 8LX
T 01539 816300
mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

Registered in England as Cumbria Wildlife Trust Limited, a company limited by guarantee No. 0724133. Registered Charity No. 218711. The data received from this form will not be shared with any third parties.



A Cumbria Local Nature Partnership project delivered by Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Restoring your meadow

The Meadow Life project works with landowners and communities to identify, restore and help people manage hay meadows using traditional practices. This has benefits for landowners and increases biodiversity.

The restoration of a meadow aims to increase its botanical diversity. This can be done through changes in management and by methods to introduce wildflowers including spreading green hay, broadcasting seed, slot seeding and using plug plants. The techniques used are dictated by the site, seed source, and machinery and livestock available. Successful restoration also needs the commitment from the landowner to long-term appropriate management of the meadow. Restoration of a meadow can often be a lengthy process with improvements being observed over a period of years.

How to restore your meadow



1 Take a good look at your meadow to identify its main features and attributes. This includes a soil test to ascertain fertility and pH, a botanical survey to identify which species are present, including the presence of problem species such as dock and thistle and more competitive species such as white clover, creeping buttercup and Yorkshire fog.



Photo: D Kennedy

2 If necessary, reduce the dominance of grasses. This is typically done by introducing parasitic species such as yellow rattle and eyebright in the early years of restoration.



3 Once competitive species have been reduced, locate a donor site or appropriate source for seed. Take your hay crop up to a week before the agreed date for seed spreading and remove the hay.



4 In the day or two before seed spreading, create 50-80% bare ground in the field (for example, by power harrowing).



6 You may also choose to introduce plug plants at this stage. If so, make sure the plug plants are well rooted, leaving four to six weeks before grazing with animals.



7 During the following autumn and spring, graze the field heavily for intermittent short periods to keep the sward low. Maintain a sward height of about 3cm (1.5 inches). Protect from heavy poaching.



8 In future years, cut for hay after mid-July, then manage traditionally with aftermath grazing and low (or no) inputs of farmyard manure.

9 Survey your meadow to assess how successful the restoration has been and continue to monitor annually to assess if further restoration (i.e. plug plants) is required.

