

# MeadowMat

## How to suppress grasses

**First of all – grass is good. It will provide good soil coverage in winter time when some of the flowering plants are dormant. That's great for wildlife habitat and it's great for keeping the soil warm and moist so that seeds can germinate. However, you might feel you have too much grass in your MeadowMat and want to reduce the ratio of grasses to flowers.**

### **Is there too much grass in my wildflower area?**

If you feel you have too much grass. Think about the time of year. In autumn, winter and early spring some of the flowering plants are dormant. You won't see their foliage but that doesn't mean they're not there.

You should not expect to see every wildflower species every year. These plants are fickle. If the weather conditions are not right, the soil does not have their preferred balance of nutrients or they do not like the neighbouring plants – they will not grow. However, it is possible to manage your meadow and suppress grasses if you are patient, persistent and consistent.

### **How do I get more flowers and less grass?**

Key is the reduction of soil fertility. Truly low nutrient soil is hard to find as most of our gardens have been built on existing garden or farmland. Grass thrives in well fed soil and tends to out perform some wild flowers.

Be prepared to take a little extra time each autumn to weed out some of the grasses and reseed (or plug plant) the bare patches with wild flowers. There is an amazing little bi-annual plant called yellow rattle that you should add to your species mix as it is semi-parasitic on grass.

### **Why Yellow Rattle?**

Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) is an annual plant that favours grassy meadows. It grows to around 30cm and the flowers are yellow and quite subtle – they do not create a huge splash of colour. It has distinctive seedpods that rattle loudly in their pods when the wind blows or you shake the plants. Yellow rattle roots attach to grass roots and draw nutrients from them. The grass is weakened by it – which is why wildflower meadow makers love it and farmers hate it.

### **How do I grow Yellow Rattle?**

This is one of the trickier wild flowers to introduce into a meadow. Old seed will not grow so be prepared to gather seed from your own meadow each summer and sow it fresh that autumn. Simply sprinkling the seeds onto an area of thick grass will not work and you will need to choose an area where the grass is already slightly weaker. Or, you could weed out some of the grass plants and sow yellow rattle in the spaces.

You will need to be persistent. If the grass is particularly robust, it may take more than one season for the yellow rattle to sort it out and allow more wild flowers to germinate. It may be several seasons before you are truly happy with the proportion of grasses to wildflowers.

**Farmers who were nurturing meadows were never pleased to be invaded by yellow rattle (aka hay rattle) which naturally suppresses grass. For those of us though who are growing ornamental wildflower meadows, yellow rattle is an enormous help.**

