Creating the ultimate... flower-rich grass margin



Roger Draycott is our head of advisory and has worked as both a gamebird scientist and advisor, specialising in the management and ecology of pheasants and partridges. good wild flower margin can be a very beneficial and attractive farmland habitat. If properly established and well managed, they will support a broad range of invertebrates including pollinating insects like bumblebees and honey bees; plant feeding insects such as grasshoppers, bugs and butterflies; and

predatory invertebrates such as spiders and beetles. These margins should be a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers, ideally placed next to hedgerows, and should aim to provide pollen and nectar sources from spring until the autumn.



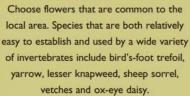
Prepare the seed bed. The old adage 'well sown is half grown' is particularly true for wild flower margins. Create a stale seedbed by cultivating the soil and then, when the weeds have germinated, spray off with glyphosate.

Cut margins twothree times in the first year to help keep thistles, docks and weeds under control

EXPERT ADVICE

Sow, ideally by broadcasting, in spring or late summer after first preparing a fine tilth and follow by rolling. Use a mix of fine grasses like fescues and bents.

Wildflowers can comprise 5-20% of the mix.







Margins can be from three-six metres wide and should be cut two-three times in the first year. This will help keep thistles, docks and other weeds under control and allow the grasses to tiller. In subsequent years, half the margin should be cut early in the growing season and the other half later in the year – this will help prolong the flowering season. Removing the cuttings will benefit the flowers, as they can be suppressed if smothered by thick swathes of cut grass.





Well-managed margins can provide an abundance of flowers for many years and plenty of birds will use them as insect-rich foraging areas too.