

My front lawn by Michael Blencowe of the Sussex Wildlife Trust

Plant it and they will come

Do you remember that Kevin Costner movie, Field Of Dreams? Kev plays an Iowa farmer who, after hearing strange voices, transforms his land into a baseball pitch and summons the ghosts of a long-dead baseball team. Ridiculous. Yet, when I bought my first home eight years ago and stood on my new, perfectly manicured 15ft by 20ft suburban front lawn, all I could hear were voices in my head telling me to destroy it.

Rumours spread of my debauched gardening plans. My new neighbours eyed me with suspicion – especially when they overheard that I was planning to hire a stripper for the weekend. The clattering of the petrol-powered turf stripper was only drowned out by my maniacal laughter as I razed the 300 square feet of lawn to mud. You could hear the house prices dropping all along the cul-de-sac. The neighbourhood watched from behind twitching curtains as I carefully broadcast native wildflower seeds over the bare soil. Through the wet winter my front lawn looked ready to host a re-enactment of The Battle of Agincourt. And then spring came.

Meadow Buttercup, Oxeye Daisy, Cowslip, Yellow Rattle, Lady's Bedstraw, Crested Dogtail, Red Clover, Ragged Robin. The ground erupted into a riot of colour. And then the wildlife arrived. Bees, bee-flies, beetles, burnets and butterflies. Unusual species appeared too: Wall Brown and Brown Hairstreak butterflies, Ghost Moths, Wasp Spiders and a lone Common Spotted Orchid. On summer days my mini-meadow sang to me; a choir of buzzing bumblebees and chirruping grasshoppers. My own nature reserve; beautiful, wild, endlessly fascinating and filled with life. I am genuinely bemused as I watch my neighbours struggle with their lawnmowers each week. Why go out of your way to kill something when you can just sit back and let it live? I simply swing my scythe and mow my meadow once at the end of the summer. I imagine I look like that shirtless bloke from Poldark (although I actually resemble a chunky but cheerful Grim Reaper).

Wildflower meadows were once a widespread feature of the English countryside but since the 1930's we have tragically lost 97% of our flower-rich fields. Many have been improved with fertilisers, re-seeded with faster growing grasses or ploughed for arable crops. This in turn has caused a massive decline in many species of wildlife that depend on them. By creating my own humble field of dreams it feels as if I am summoning the ghosts of the English countryside and giving them life. And then, last month, I turned the corner to see a deer, an actual

wild Roe Deer, lost in suburbia but stood seemingly at home in my meadow.
Ridiculous.

If you're interested in creating your own wildflower meadow search 'Sussex Wildlife Trust' and 'garden wildflower meadow' online.

Sussex Wildlife Trust is an independent charity caring for wildlife and habitats throughout Sussex. Founded in 1961, we have worked with local people for over half a century to make Sussex richer in wildlife.