

WHY WE GROW WILDFLOWERS

By Ted Scott

When I was a boy I was able to roam through fields that were carpeted with flowers, to hear song thrushes and see hares. Even when we moved to a midlands city, the countryside was only half an hour away. In the last fifty years, however, 95% of unimproved pastures have disappeared and with them the habitats of many birds, insects and mammals. There are many reasons, but we should be concerned with how this trend can be halted and then reversed. As a result farmers and local authorities are being encouraged to devise bio-diversity schemes

But we need to be aware of the potential dangers of inappropriate solutions. David Bellamy says that the increasing use of imported flower species is becoming as dangerous as the genetic modification of plants. Foreign species are not totally suited to our environment, they can infact take over. The only safe solution is use native wild flowers, and the closer to the planting scheme the seed for the plants can be harvested, the greater the chance of successful planting

The management of meadows is important also. Our old meadows were the product of centuries of traditional farming practices, the regular, methodical annual cycle of mowing and grazing provided the ideal conditions for both flora and fauna to flourish. It is by replicating this cycle and using appropriate plants that a successful meadow can be created

Therefore we have endeavoured to source the seed for plants from three regions, one of which is Scotland. From 'The Changing Flora of Glasgow' published last year, I have been able to draw up a list of plants that have been found in the Gorbals area. I can obtain about a third from a couple of Scottish seedsmen, many more from the north of England. The best seeds, however, are those which can be obtained from in and around Glasgow. Prof. Dickson, co-author of 'The Changing Flora of Glasgow' and a past president of the Glasgow Natural History Society, has told me that it should be possible to find appropriate plants from which to harvest seed which can then be grown on. This, besides being an activity which might appeal to members of the local community, would also be a means of reducing the cost of seed, which like all commodities is subject to Laws of Demand and Supply. Prices can range from £2 for 10g to over £20 for 10g for a few species

We believe that we can produce plants that will have a greater success rate than the 60% which is the norm. By including slow release and water storage granules in our peat-free compost we provide each plant with 12 months of feed and a better water retention capacity and as a result they are better able to thrive and compete with surrounding plants. These together with regular management should produce stunning displays