

Growing Orchard Communities

COMMUNITY ORCHARD TOOLKIT



Grassland management in orchards

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Background to UK grasslands

A brief history...

- Most grassland in the UK is 'semi-natural'
- Resulted from human influence from Neolithic period
- Since then, grasslands and their biodiversity have flourished, until...
- The Industrial Revolution and
- Post World War 2 intensification
- Nature Conservancy Council (1984) suggests 97% loss in wildflower meadows between 1930 and 1984
- Losses have continued – 2% of UK grasslands are 'species rich'
- Declines have recently slowed due to agri-environment schemes, legal protection (SSSI's/National Parks)

Why manage grasslands?

1. To protect habitats and biodiversity
 - Lowland meadows can support:
 - 30 grass species
 - 100 wildflower species
 - Invertebrates
 - Fungi
 - Birds
 - Small mammals
 - Reptiles and amphibians
2. To provide other environmental benefits
 - Important for carbon sequestration, offsetting impacts of climate change
 - Resource protection: water, soil, nutrients, crops (orchard trees)
 - Provide habitat for crop pollinators
 - Protection of archaeology and geology
 - Form an important part of the wider habitat 'mosaic'
3. To provide socio-cultural benefits
 - Physical, mental and spiritual well being
 - Contact with nature
 - Inspiration for art, music and literature
 - Educational resource
 - Generates sense of 'ownership'

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Types of grassland

There are a wide range of different types of grassland, but for the purpose of the workshop we have simplified things into 3 main categories. All 3 can provide different benefits to biodiversity.

- Pasture – Land used for grazing. A variety of stock can be used including cattle, sheep, goats, horses, mixed.
- Hay meadows – land cut for hay. Usually cut in late summer.
- Rough grassland – traditionally neglected or hard to manage areas that result in rough, tussocky vegetation.
- Other habitats – hedgerows, scrub or woodland nearby provide additional benefits

1. Pasture

- Land used for feeding livestock
- In this context, can be used as a method for managing grassland
- Great for a wide variety of invertebrates (poaching, dung)
- Obvious logistical difficulties (sourcing/moving stock, securing stock)
- Different animals provide different benefits and are suitable for different areas (see table)
- Different animals will present different risks to trees – suitable tree guards are required

2. Hay meadows

- Land used to make hay
- Excellent for botanical diversity
- Great for pollinators as you allow spring/summer flowers to flower (and some to seed)
- Ideally 'aftermath' grazed to keep nutrient levels down
- Structural uniformity
- Can damage some invertebrate populations
- Can be managed by tractor/mower, pedestrian mower, strimmer or scythe – important to remove arisings
- Avoid fertilisers/pesticides

3. Rough grassland

- Neglected or difficult to manage areas (not regularly grazed or cut)
- Results in thick, matted and tussocky vegetation and deep 'litter layer'
- Often considered 'waste ground' and 'messy'
- Excellent for invertebrates, small mammals (including bats) and birds of prey
- Easy to achieve
- Manage by very extensive grazing or top every other year at about 130mm (if left unmanaged will eventually become scrub then trees)

Habitat Mosaics

- A range of habitats is best!
- Incorporate all 3 grassland types as well as other habitats:
- Hedgerows
- Woodlands
- Scrub

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- Other site uses:
- Amenity areas
- Areas for picnics, BBQs and events

Tree protection

Trees will need protecting for a range of reasons:

- Livestock
- Rabbits
- Deer
- Mowers and strimmers!

Can create other problems – grass competition, restricted growth, damage to trees

This list is not complete – many other types and combinations

Grassland restoration

- Initial aim is to improve floristic diversity
- Main tool is yellow rattle
- Best managed with a hay cut and aftermath grazing