



IDEAS ON MAKING GRASS GREENER....

LEAVENHEATH • POLSTEAD • STOKE BY NAYLAND

The average closely mown lawn is far from 'green', with little wildlife interest and relatively high levels of energy needed to keep it that way. At the same time we all know that reducing energy consumption and promoting biodiversity is the way forward, so why are so many of us still reluctant to apply this to our patch of garden grass? It can't be traditional to keep large areas of grass short - so is it just that now we all have petrol mowers and strimmers we feel we should keep using them?

The easiest way to produce greener grass is to cut less of it and cut less often! Not only will this save time and energy (both fuel and your own) but longer grass is more drought tolerant because it creates a cooler micro-climate at its base. This makes it better able to retain moisture from dew and rainfall so requires less watering. It also reduces surface water run-off (which can contribute to flooding,) and as a bonus there are fewer cuttings to dispose of.

Then there are the wildlife benefits: an area of grass 'let go' can produce a surprising number of wild flowers, different species of grass and the occasional sedge or rush. These in turn provide habitat for a host of insects, birds, voles, hedgehogs, reptiles, amphibians, and even bats feeding overhead - quite a contribution from a scruffy patch of grass!

Many of us worry about a perceived need to 'keep it under control.' But a couple of points to consider are that the average adjustable-height petrol mower will cut and pick up a season's growth in a couple of passes and an end-of-season cut produces a coarse hay-like material, good for composting, mulching (and habitat



piles) instead of all those slimy cuttings and trips to the dump. If you're concerned that your "grass" simply looks abandoned, cutting the margins to about 2 mower widths adds a look of purposeful management rather than dereliction!

My own patch of wildlife grassland has been cut annually for the last 15 years and I'm continually surprised at what plants and animals turn up in it. The area has gradually increased to about a third of the back garden (as much as I'm allowed) so this year I started on the front. I tend these areas with as much enthusiasm and pleasure as a conventional gardener and am as pleased to see my Cowslips and Meadow Foxtail in the spring as they are to see their Crocuses.

This information comes from Green Teams supporter Richard Kilshaw, an ecologist whose work involves wild life surveys and site assessment. If you want more information on Greener Grass you can contact Richard on 01206 262008 or Rkilshaweco@aol.com