

Spreading hay

Lowland meadow suitable for green hay collection in mid-late July

ADVISORY NOTE

Bringing back the meadows

Using green hay

This technique can be used where the species-rich hay meadow (donor site) is less than two miles away from the site being restored (receptor site).

The receptor site must be suitably prepared so that it is ready when the hay is cut (by mid-July for lowland sites).

All the operations described overleaf should be carried out the same day, although the mown grass can be left *in situ* for one day (before picking up) to reduce its weight and bulk. This may lead to some seed loss of Yellow Rattle and other species which are very ripe at the time of harvest.



Yellow Rattle – a vital species for successful grassland restoration projects

Photos: Sue Everett

Spreading hay



Photos: Richard Pywell, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

Mow the hay when the main grasses, such as Red Fescue, Meadow Barley and Meadow Foxtail hold ripe seed, and the Yellow Rattle seed is still on the plants (mid-July for southern-central England or late July–early August for upland Britain).

- ✿ Use a mower without a conditioner to mow the grass.
- ✿ Rake the mown grass into lines/swathes (optional, depending on machinery).
- ✿ Pick up the grass and make up to six round bales at a time.
- ✿ Load the bales on to a trailer and cart them to the receptor site.
- ✿ Load each bale into the straw chopper; chop and spread the chopped grass across the field at a ratio of 1:2–1:3 (for every hectare mown on the donor site, spread over between two and three hectares on the receptor site).
- ✿ Do not leave the hay in bales for more than one hour to prevent the bales from heating up and the seed from deteriorating.
- ✿ Roll (optional – some consider unnecessary).
- ✿ Late-flowering species, such as Lady's Bedstraw, will need to be collected by hand and sown separately at a later date.

This technique can be scaled down for small sites, using standard machinery that is available on the farm. Pedestrian machinery, e.g. a mini-baler, brush-cutter or

petrol lawn mower, can be used for harvesting green hay from species-rich road verges, steep chalk grassland or even churchyards – often the only reservoirs of wild plant diversity remaining in intensively farmed agricultural landscapes. If the hay is not chopped it must be spread thinly and not left in heaps on the receptor site.

Machinery and labour

Mowing: tractor with drum mower and front forks

Raking: tractor with liner (optional)

Baling: tractor with trailed round baler

Loading: tractor with front forks (same as mower)

Carting: tractor with flat-bed trailer

Loading into straw chopper: tractor with front forks

Spreading: tractor and straw chopper

People: two or three.

Work rate: up to 4ha of a receptor site can be treated per day.

Using dry hay bales

Spreading hay from dry hay bales has been successfully used to create and restore wildflower grassland in the Dartmoor National Park. However, the seed content (quantity and diversity) of dry bales will vary and may be low as seed will have dropped out while the hay was drying, turned and baled.

See www.actionforwildlife.org.uk/admin/Documents/Haymeadowsleaflet.pdf.

For further advisory notes, case studies, guidelines for planting projects in the countryside, training opportunities and suppliers of native flora, go to www.floralocale.org



Flora locale, Denford Manor, Hungerford, Berkshire RG17 0UN

Tel: 01488 680 458 Email: info@floralocale.org Website: www.floralocale.org

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