



Creating your meadow

At last, you're ready to create your meadow –and *preparation is everything!* If you are laying matting, **DON'T** order it yet. Your MeadowMat is freshly cut and **MUST** be laid as soon as it arrives. So first you need to do all the necessary preparation.

Step 1: Marking out Once you have chosen your location, use sticks or other aids to mark out the size and shape of your meadow. Remember to view this from all angles to imagine how it might look (and make one last check that there aren't any large overhanging trees to impede the sunlight).

Step 2: Removing grass and vegetation If your meadow is replacing an area of grass, you must remove this either with a spade or a turf-cutting machine. You need to remove 'slices' of turf, so make vertical cuts to a depth of 3-4 inches, creating square or rectangular shapes; then slice horizontally two or three inches below the surface just beyond these vertical cuts. Finally use a spade to carefully separate the turf from the ground, rolling it up as you go. These rolls of unwanted turf can be left to rot down in a corner of the garden for compost. If your area has other plants – bushes, shrubs, weeds etc – these must be completely removed as well. NB: if you are worried that you may not have removed ALL the weeds and vegetation, you can apply a systemic weed-killer such as glyphosate and leave the area for at least three weeks before digging over the soil.

Step 3: Assessing your soil Wild flowers need soil which is poor in nutrients, and this also helps to keep the grasses under control. Most cultivated areas in your garden will be too rich and you will have to remove the top soil. If you're not sure, can you answer 'yes' to any of these:

- Has the area has been used for gardening or farming?
- Do stinging nettles and docks flourish there?
- Is the soil nice and crumbly when moist?
- Is the soil a good dark colour?

'Yes' to any of these indicates a rich, fertile soil which will need to be removed. But to be absolutely safe, remove the top soil anyway.

Step 4: Removing fertile soil Remove the top soil to a depth of at least 10cm, being careful not to disrupt any cabling or pipework in the ground. Don't worry about the ground level dropping as the meadow will never be cut lower than about 4 inches, so you won't notice the difference. The soil you remove can be useful in other parts of the garden – in the vegetable garden, topping up tubs and planters, scattering around trees and shrubs, or giving away to grateful neighbours.

Step 5: Adding low-fertility top soil (optional) Step 4 above should be sufficient to reduce the fertility of the soil, but if you are not able to remove all of the good soil, you can replace what you did remove with low-fertility soil, ideal for wild flowers. We sell low-fertility soil because it can be very hard to find (after all, most gardeners want the opposite!). While it adds to the overall cost, it buys you peace of mind and adds to the performance of your meadow matting.

Alternatively, as it is the grasses that will take over on fertile soil, you can lay the Birds and Bees variety which contains only 20% grasses; or you can lay the traditional matting, mow it short for the first year and remove all of the clippings – this will gradually reduce the soil's fertility but of course you will miss out on any flowers while doing this.

Don't panic! You might think that sorting out the soil is just too much of a challenge, but it isn't. We simply offer all these tips because not reducing the soil's fertility is the most common reason for a potentially wonderful meadow going wrong. So it is well worth the effort!

MeadowMat is freshly cut and must be laid as soon as it arrives, so prepare your site before ordering.

The tools you will need

You don't need any special tools to create your meadow. A garden fork and spade, some watering equipment and maybe a few planks of wood (so that you don't walk on the area when you are laying matting or sowing seed) are enough for the job.

If you have a large area you might decide to hire a turf-cutting machine and you might also want to use a rotovator instead of digging over the soil.

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Step 6: Preparing the new surface For both matting and seeds you need to rotovate or dig over the site to create a 15 cm layer of fine tilth (just as you would for a normal seed bed). But remember NOT to add any compost or fertiliser! Then rake the surface to make it level. Resist the instinct to water the ground. The drier it is, the more accurately you can check that the first watering goes right through to the soil (see step 9).

Step 7: Order Your MeadowMat normally takes three working days for delivery, and must be laid as soon as you receive it. So it's vital that you plan carefully and don't order until you know you're ready. Remember to measure the area carefully, including any odd-shaped corners. If your meadow includes both straight and round edges, you will need to break the total area down into sections, calculate the area of each and then add them up. Always add an extra 5% to your total area for trimmings and wastage.

Step 8: Laying your matting When laying MeadowMat you follow exactly the same method as for laying grass turf. However, MeadowMat rolls are heavy so it might take two people to carry them. You must avoid walking on fresh matting, so always try to work backwards, and if you do have to walk across newly-laid matting, try to use a wooden plank to spread the load.

Unroll a piece of matting roughly in position, then gently manoeuvre it into place. Do the same with the next piece, butting it up against the first, and so on. If you have oddly shaped corners, leave these to the end, cutting them from your leftovers.

Step 9: Watering newly-laid matting It is really important to keep your new matting moist, right down to the soil below. And because you shouldn't walk on it, you may need a good sprinkler or hose pipe to reach the entire area. As soon as the matting is laid give it a very good watering; gently lift a corner to check that the water has drained through to the soil. You must keep it well-watered for a good three weeks, maybe more, until the matting has 'bonded' to the soil.

