

Southern

Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire,
Berkshire, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Wildflower development on Eastcombe Allotment Site, Gloucestershire

Eastcombe Allotments are in the Cotswolds near Stroud. The site has 57 plots and stands at a height of just over 213 metres (700 feet). The soil, being Cotswold brash, without doubt contains a lot of stones – but you learn to live with them! A considerable number of improvements have taken place recently, such as installing a large number of water tanks and erecting a post and rail fence complete with stockproof fencing, to prevent dogs wandering from the adjacent playing field and possibly contaminating produce. During my three years as Allotment Warden, we have witnessed a greater diversity of enthusiastic tenants encompassing a wide age range and an improved balance of sexes. Currently the site does not have an association, but we may get there! Meanwhile, I am a NAS member.

Several years ago, a small area of 100 square metres (1076 square feet) was set aside with the intention of allowing

tenants to burn any non-compostable materials, but it became a dumping ground for all sorts of material and the public became wise to its existence too, so thanks to Bisley-with-Lypiatt Parish Council (who administer the site), this area was totally cleared for construction of the fence.

Due to concerns about the decline of insects and wildflowers, it was agreed that a wildflower area be created, and as the area required little groundwork we went ahead and produced a list of 26 species of flowers that one can find growing in the Cotswolds, including Teasel (a plant of historic interest in Gloucestershire as its seed head played a vital part in the weaving industry) and Yellow Rattle (always beneficial in wildflower meadows as it is parasitic on grass and reduces its vigour, thus helping the establishment of the flowers). The area is in a sunny aspect but has some shade too which suits some of the plants.

All the seed was purchased from Wildflowers UK, based in Gloucestershire, and 1 gram of each species was mixed in a container and broadcast in late March 2020 – but that was followed by several weeks of little rainfall. However, when rain did eventually arrive, the area started to spring into life quite quickly, and by late summer we had seen thousands of poppies in flower plus Common Mallow, Sainfoin, Tufted Vetch and Bladder Campion. In late autumn all the plants were trimmed down and left for a week for any seed to fall to the ground, and then the arisings were raked away. Many of the species sown are perennials so it is only in 2021 that the Teasel, Oxeye Daisies etc. commenced flowering and over the next couple of years it will be interesting to record which species are becoming established. 2021 has certainly turned out to be the year of the Oxeye Daisy, with many thousands of flowers providing a wonderful display.

It was interesting to read the article on *Phacelia tanacetifolia* in Issue 4 (2020) of the magazine. I have grown this green manure for many years and the sound of humming bees and hoverflies is truly amazing.

Robert Bryant, Allotment
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