

Culbokie Meadow Explained

About the Meadow

Culbokie Green is a perennial wildflower meadow, meaning it's filled with plants that live for several years. This type of meadow contains a mix of grasses and flowering plants, which together create a complete habitat for local wildlife. Perennial meadows take many years to fully mature. A key plant in this process is **yellow rattle**, which helps weaken the grasses, making more room for diverse flowers to thrive over time.

Annual wildflower meadows, which contain plants that live and die in a single year, are generally more colourful than perennial ones. However, they require the soil to be disturbed (ploughed) annually for the seeds to take hold. Without this, the annuals can't compete with other plants and eventually disappear. Many of these flowers, like corn flower and corn marigold, are named for their historic association with ploughed agricultural land.

At Culbokie Green, volunteers are establishing small patches of annual wildflowers along the roadsides to add more colour. However, this is a labour-intensive effort, as the areas must be dug up and reseeded every year so only small areas can be achieved.



Culbokie perennial meadow (Penny Edwards)



Annual meadow near Dornoch (Caroline Snow)

The Art of Scything

When volunteers begin scything the meadow at the end of summer, it often draws comments from passers-by ranging from nostalgic to questioning. While some suggest using machinery, there are several good reasons for choosing to scythe by hand.

The meadow must be left to grow throughout the summer so all the species can flower and set seed. In September, the entire area must then be cut down and the

material removed to prevent the soil from becoming too fertile, which would favour grasses over flowers. The thick, dense vegetation would be impossible to cut with a regular mower or strimmer. While a power scythe could be used, hand scything offers several benefits:

- It's a great **team activity**, making it a social and safe volunteer event.
- It's **quiet and clean**, with no noise or fuel consumption.
- Hand scythes cut the vegetation cleanly and leave it in neat rows that are easy to collect.
- The cutting action helps **scatter seeds**, aiding the spread of new flowers.
- Many people enjoy the physical activity of scything
- The hand tools are relatively cheap and easy to store.

Each late August and September, around 15 trained scythe operators work together to mow the meadow.



Mowing in Sept 2025 (Penny Edwards)



Stacking the hay (Penny Edwards)

From Haystacks to Compost

While traditional farms use the cut hay for animal feed, the hay from Culbokie Green is turned into compost to help grow local vegetables. After cutting, volunteers rake the hay into small haystacks, creating a picturesque "Alpine scene." The haystacks are then collected and transported off-site for composting. In the spring, this compost is used to add fertility to local vegetable gardens.

After the hay is removed, the ground is lightly scarified to create bare patches of soil. Seeds of the species we want to encourage can be sown into these areas, such as yellow rattle or Devil's Bit scabious, which provides late-season colour and a nectar source.

With the new seeds sown, the cycle is complete. The meadow will begin to grow again in the spring, with new species gradually adding to its diversity and colour as it matures.