

Wildlife Friendly Gardening

Hi all, I hope you are doing okay and keeping safe during this difficult time. As a contingency for not being able to hold our sessions, I have made a video session and put it online. You can find a video at the following website address: <https://youtu.be/rq45J3-goAQ>

The following document is a written version of this video. I wanted to share some stories about my efforts to do wildlife friendly gardening. In particular my efforts to make a wildflower meadow.

Battle with moles...



When I first moved into my new house two years ago, the lawn was being constantly dug up by moles. I had a long battle with the moles, in which I attempted to dig giant pitfall traps in was to catch them. My plan was to then drive them down the road and put them into a farmer's field. Unfortunately the moles were too clever for me, and dug around the pitfall traps, sometimes digging near them enough to fill them in entirely.

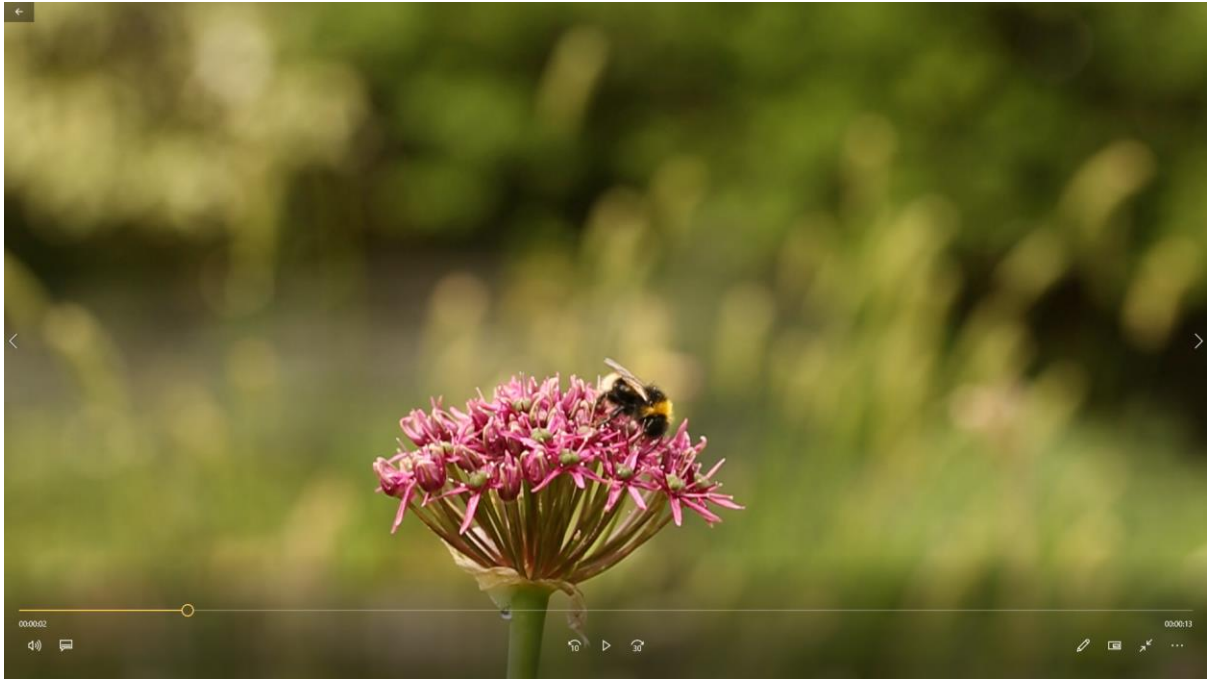
I read somewhere that moles do not like the smell of daffodil bulbs, so I planted many daffodils throughout the lawn. I later found out that this information was a load of rubbish, so I had plenty of moles, and lots of beautiful daffodils in the lawn.



I also read that moles do not like the smell of dog faeces, and so I buried some of it under the ground. None of this worked and in the end I just left the moles to it, and eventually they settled down. The consensus was that they had either moved on somewhere else, or finished establishing their territory in my garden, and therefore no longer needed to dig new holes.

Alliums...

Once the moles had gone, I planted allium bulbs in the lawn. Alliums, members of the onion family, produce large globular flowers full of nectar. These flowers act like a restaurant and bees stay on them for a long time, allowing me to film and photograph them. The only problem with alliums is that they are extremely easily trampled, both by myself, when I'm not paying attention, and by any visiting dog to my house, of which there are many.



Wildflowers...

My next step was to actually start creating a meadow. Ideally when turning a lawn into a wildflower meadow, you need to completely remove the top layer of turf. This is nutrient rich, and nutrients are the enemies of wildflowers. Wildflowers thrive in low nutrient conditions, in high nutrient conditions, grass species will readily take advantage and outcompete the wildflowers.

However, because I was slightly lazy and did not want to dig up the entire lawn, I decided to scarify it. This basically means scraping it with a rake until you expose some bare patches of Earth. Over this ground i.e. free down some wildflower seed and unsurprisingly, very little of it grew.

Next tactic was to cheat, so I went to local garden centre and brought some ready grown wildflower plants and planted in the lawn. These were a massive success and continue to thrive to this day such as Musk Mallow:



Another success was in pots I sowed red Campion wildflower seeds that had been donated to me by Natural England people at Bank Island, where we went for a field trip. The red Campion readily germinated and provided a fantastic display of pink flowers throughout the late summer and into autumn:



Battle with yellow rattle...

Another way to help wildflowers to thrive, in addition to lowering the nutrients, is to grow yellow rattle plants:



These wildflowers are partially parasitic, and tap into the roots of nearby grasses, making them less vigorous. Unfortunately I found it almost impossible to grow these. I tried sowing seeds directly into the ground and it did nothing. I tried growing seeds in pots and none of them germinated. I even ordered wildflower plug plants of yellow rattle and planted them straight into the ground. None of this really worked, and out of the 30 plug plants, I think I only saw one yellow rattle flowering last summer. Anyone has any tips on how I can get this to work, let me know!

That's it for this week's session on wildlife gardening. Next week I will properly continue the theme, with a look at what you can put in flower beds and the rest of the garden to attract wildlife.

Find of the Week

I realise it's going to be quite difficult to have a find of the week without a session. However, if you want to email me any pictures of things you've seen, or simply drop me a few lines about them, then I can share them in the next document or video. This way we can still share our appreciation of nature together even if we can't actually be in the same room.

I'm going to leave you with a few images from our last session, which was the field trip to Homestead Park. Here we saw a variety of amazing flowers and also a massive frog!



Something to try...

It will feel difficult to do therapeutic nature related tasks during this so-called lockdown, however I highly recommend you try something, no matter how small. The task I'm going to suggest that this week, is simply to open a window and see if you can hear any birdsong. You don't have to know what the bird is, just listen to it, try to describe the pattern of the sound, the volume, where you think it's coming from, and if you get chance, maybe drop me a couple of lines about it.

Thank you for reading and/or watching.

Stay safe and best wishes,

Phil