



Nidderdale
National
Landscape



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A GUIDE TO grassland management and creation

Before using this resource, you may want to use our '**types of grassland found in Nidderdale National Landscape**' guide to better understand what type of grassland you currently own/manage. With this knowledge you will be better equipped to create a species-rich grassland suited to your field.

Grasslands are a semi-natural habitat that require human intervention to persist, otherwise they would scrub up and eventually become woodland without sufficient natural grazing pressure. This resource provides information on different ways to manage grassland that primarily benefit nature.

MOWING

Appropriate grassland types:

- Hay meadow
- Purple moor grass and rush pasture
- semi-improved grassland
- improved grassland.

When and how to mow a grassland, whether it's to make hay or combat dominating species, is a really important factor in managing grasslands for nature.

Mowing a hay meadow

Mowing a hay meadow from **late-July onwards** is generally considered an appropriate time as most of the plant species present will have flowered and produced seeds. **Cutting your grasslands too early in the year** when plants have not flowered and set seed can mean species are lost. This is especially true for annual species that only live 1-year and need to set seed for them to return the next year. **Not cutting at all can also be detrimental** as dead vegetation can smother the ground, making it harder for seeds to make contact with the soil and germinate. Continuing not to cut will eventually lead to scrub and tree species colonising and start the process of the conversion of grassland to woodland. **Removing the mown vegetation is really important.**

Mowing purple moor grass and rush pasture

Purple Moor grass and rush pasture is mostly managed through grazing, however, **rushes and tussocky grasses can be mown periodically** to prevent them from dominating and to help create a variety of vegetation structures. Mowing **should be performed outside of the breeding bird season** (breeding season April to late-July), ideally in late autumn, to protect eggs and chicks. When mowing, try not to cut in rectangular blocks and instead, **mow in a wandering pattern** to create more natural looking edges



Mown vegetation lying in rows within a hay meadow. Hay will be dried, baled and stored to feed livestock during colder months.

Mowing semi-improved grassland

If a semi-improved grassland is being managed as a hay meadow, follow the instructions for as such. However, if soil nutrient levels are high or plant diversity is low, it may take several years of mowing before other species colonise naturally. See the section for ground preparation for further advice.

Mowing improved grassland

An improved grassland can be mown 3-4 times a year if managing to create silage/haylage - **this severely limits the value of the grassland to nature** as organisms don't have time to complete their life cycles before mowing happens. However, to help convert an improved grassland to something more species-rich, mowing up to 3-4 times a year for a short time can help drive soil nutrient levels down. If patches of flowering plants colonise, don't mow these areas till plants have set seed. It would likely take several years of mowing before other species colonise naturally and adding wildflower seed once nutrient levels have fallen. **See the section for ground preparation for further advice.**

GRAZING

Appropriate grassland types:

- Hay meadow
- Purple moor grass and rush pasture
- Lowland dry acidic grassland
- Calcareous grassland
- Calaminarian grassland
- Semi-improved grassland
- Improved grassland

Grazing at the right time, intensity and with the correct animal are all crucial elements in managing a grassland for biodiversity.

Grazing a hay meadow

Livestock should be removed before the main growing season between April - July/August to let plants flower and set seed. Once mown, livestock can be allowed back in again **to graze the "aftermath" growth** (new grass grown after the hay is first cut). **Remove livestock in the wettest winter months** to prevent too much ground disturbance from their hooves. **Livestock can be put into a hay meadow once again in late-Winter/early-Spring** up in until early April when they should be removed.

Grazing purple moor grass and rush pasture

Light seasonal grazing by cows is the best method of grazing a purple moor grass and rush pasture, however, sheep and ponies are also suitable. Livestock will help keep a variety of vegetation heights, some short and others long, which benefits species such as wading

birds. **Try not to graze during the breeding bird season (April-July)** to reduce disturbance to ground-nesting birds and aim to **graze from mid-August into November**. Remove livestock in the wettest winter months to prevent too much ground disturbance. **See our "managing grassland for wading birds" resource for more information.**



Cows grazing rush pasture.

Grazing lowland dry acidic & Lowland calcareous grassland

Light grazing throughout the growing season is the traditional way to manage both these grassland types. If managing primarily for nature, **grazing could be removed until late-Summer** to allow plant species to flower and set seed and then be more heavily grazed to remove that year's growth. Some earlier very light grazing can be done to prevent vegetation getting too tall during the growing season, however, careful consideration of the types of plant species you have in your grassland is needed. **Remove livestock in the wettest winter months** to prevent too much ground disturbance.

Grazing semi-improved and improved grassland

A semi-improved/improved grassland may be over-grazed and/or grazed at the wrong time of year. Overgrazing causes vegetation to be a uniformed height and prevents plants from flowering. Grazing at the wrong time of year can also prevent plants from flowering as they are eaten before doing so. If you currently manage/own a semi-improved grassland, **try to reduce the number of livestock** to see if more species of plant flower and set seed. Also, **graze from late-Summer onwards to allow plant species to flower and set seed**. These simple changes may be enough to gradually increase the diversity of plants present.

OTHER RESOURCES

Continue to learn how to manage your grassland for nature using the other resources available on the Nidderdale National Landscape website. Resources include:

- Creating species-rich grassland
- Managing grassland for birds of prey
- Managing your grassland for fungi
- Managing your grassland for invertebrates
- Managing your grassland for wading birds

FUNDING

To help fund grassland management, try and take advantage of agri-environment schemes. These can help fund restoration works and ongoing management. Below are two funding schemes which you may be eligible for.

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI): [Sustainable Farming Incentive: guidance for applicants and agreement holders](#)

Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT): [Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier](#)

Contact us

If you have any questions about managing your grasslands, please get in touch with our team:

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