

Shamley Green Environment Group

Yellow Rattle: the 'Meadow Maker'

It's great to see so many wild flowers returning to our commons now that they are mown less frequently - ox eye daisies, buttercups, dandelions, greater birds foot trefoil, clovers, dead nettles....and lots more.



But encouraging wild flowers to thrive on our commons where there was once little else but grass is a slow process, so we have enlisted the help of Yellow Rattle, an interesting annual plant with pretty yellow flowers and a sneaky habit of stealing nutrients straight from the roots of grasses! This gives the other wildflowers a competitive edge, eventually turning species-poor grassland into wildflower-rich meadow - hence it's nickname of 'Meadow Maker'.

Yellow Rattle is not completely reliant on robbery - unlike a truly parasitic plant it has chlorophyll so it can make its own food too. Although it prefers grasses it will go for plants in the pea family as well, which can also be too vigorous in a wildflower meadow. Another benefit of encouraging Yellow Rattle is that the caterpillars of the rare Grass Rivulet moth absolutely rely on it, eating the seeds inside the seed capsule before pupating underground - we were delighted to see a Grass Rivulet included in local expert John Portess' moth report for 2024.

Look out for 6" spikes of yellow tubular flowers from May to September, followed by dry brown inflated seed pods in which the seeds rattle about - when we find them we're sprinkling the seeds widely in the autumn as they need a winter in the soil to germinate successfully the next spring. They are thriving on Malt House Green where we originally introduced them, but popping up in lots of other places too.

For more information on wildflower planting on Shamley Green commons see <https://www.shamleygreenenvironment.co.uk/wildflowerplanting>, and for a month by month snapshot of the lovely wildflowers we have here see our 'wildflower diary' pages.

Himalayan Balsam

A less welcome and very invasive species is Himalayan Balsam. Its pretty pink flower makes it easy to spot but it should be removed before it has the chance to seed. The seed pods can cast their seeds up to 7 metres away. It can be pulled out easily by hand. We are lucky in Shamley Green that we don't have too much of it on our common land and verges but there is some around and if it is not controlled it can really spread so please remove it when you see it. It loves wet ground. Volunteers often do a few sessions along Norley Lane and in Norley Woods and will again this year, as ever do get in touch if you feel like joining or starting a working party.