

## Grass cutting equipment

Grassland	Equipment	Benefits/Disadvantages
Short even turf (25-50mm)	Cylinder mower	Produces very fine sward but can only be used on level, smooth ground. Unsuitable for tussocky or coarse grass. Needs skill in operating and maintaining
Short to medium grass (up to 300mm)	Rotary mower	Easy to use. Tackles slightly uneven ground. Good for wildflower lawns in conjunction with strimmer. Unsuitable for very coarse or uneven grassland or for large areas. Needs regular maintenance
Medium to long grass above 300mm	Scythes	Easy to use once fitted to suit operator. Suitable for coarse and tussocky grass. Portable and easy to maintain but does not collect grass, and unsuitable for large areas. Skill required in using.
	Strimmers	Easy to use but noisy. Suitable for coarse and tussocky grass. Portable and has interchangeable brush cutter head. Does not collect strimmings and can take sometime to learn technique to avoid strimming the ground as well as grass. Small mammals, slow worms and amphibians can be caught up and harmed.
	Power scythes/ Reciprocating mowers	Tackles large areas including wet and uneven ground. Breaks up tussocks and areas of coarse vegetation. Raking and baling attachments available. Expensive and needs secure storage.
Large areas of long grass	Farm equipment	Essential for areas over an acre. Efficient cutting and baling. Incentive to attract farmer to cut and take bales but may be difficult to find farmer available at the right time to take hay cut. Farmers may be unwilling to take hay from meadows soiled by dog fouling.

## Dealing with weeds

Get rid of agricultural weed species such as docks, creeping and spear thistle and common ragwort by digging out or spot spraying. You will also need to deal similarly with other vigorous species such as nettle, bracken, rushes and rosebay willow herb.



### Top Tips

- Leave cuttings for a couple of days to allow invertebrates time to migrate back into the stubble.
- Adopt different cutting regimes in different areas of the site to increase biodiversity.
- Leave margins of grassland uncut. Long grass is a valuable source of food for butterflies, moths and other insects. But you will need to trim these margins every other year in rotation to prevent scrub developing.
- Long grass also provides habitats for small mammals, and many birds find the grass seed highly nutritious.

### Enhancing your grassland

Once your grassland is under control and you have a regular management cycle in place, coarse grasses have been reduced and there are no weeds, you can consider introducing new species.

You can introduce plants by seeding, choosing species appropriate to the locality, soil conditions (wet or dry grassland, neutral, basic or acid soil) and those that will thrive under the mowing conditions you have established. Source seeds as locally as possible.

Rake or harrow the land in August after the hay is cut to create gaps in the sward in preparation for sowing seed in September.

Alternatively grow seeds in pots or seed trays and plant out the following autumn in groups.

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[www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk)

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# Managing Grasslands: Cutting & Mowing

A guide for smallholders

## Traditional haymaking

Old haymeadows with their colourful wildflowers, are a result of a traditional way of managing the land over generations.

In autumn, winter and early spring the meadows are grazed. In May the meadows are 'shut up' with stock removed to allow the hay crop to grow.

Hay is normally cut in July or August after the seeds have set.

Cattle are then returned to the field to graze the aftermath or 'foggage'. Their hooves help to open up the sward to allow space for new seeds to germinate.

A light dressing of farmyard manure is applied to restore the nutrients removed with the hay crop.

Taking a hay crop and avoiding the use of artificial fertilizers keeps the level of soil nutrients low. This regime favours the finer, less competitive species.

## Restoring hay meadows

### First steps

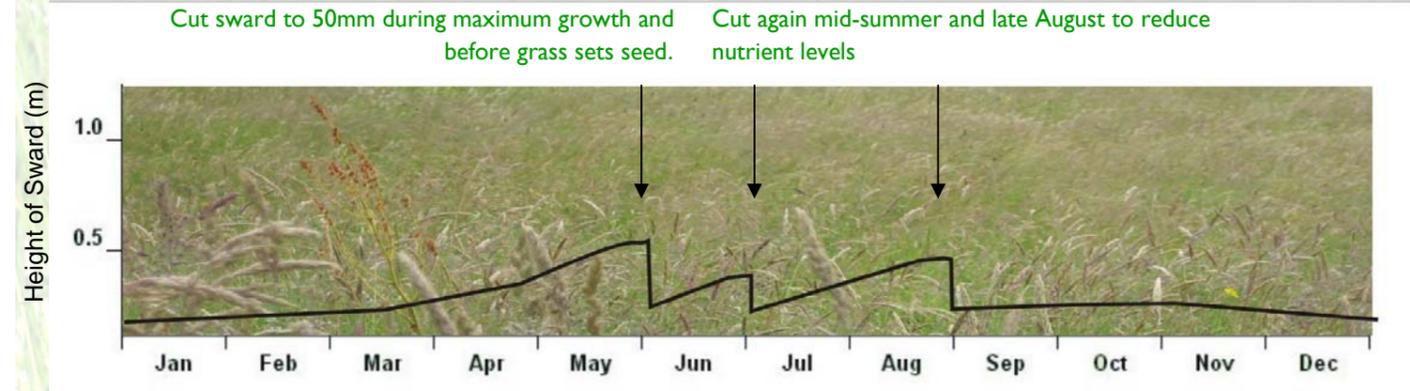
- 1 A soil test is essential to see how nutrient rich your grassland is. Low nutrient levels are best for establishing a more diverse flora. The soil phosphorus index needs to be 0 or 1. \*
- 2 A thorough plant survey will identify the grasses and other species present. Cover of competitive species must be low. You can reduce tussocky species by appropriate cutting regimes.
- 3 You need to eliminate any agricultural weeds by spot spraying or digging them up.

\* For information on soil analysis laboratories see our web site

## When to cut meadows

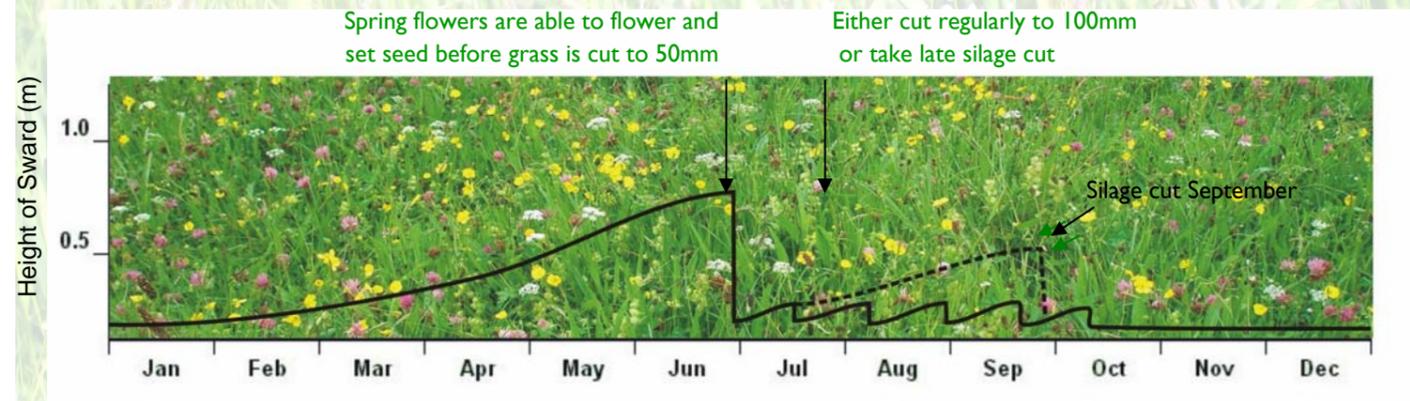
### Gaining control of coarse grasses

A tussocky, undergrazed meadow needs a cutting regime to knock out vigorous coarse grasses. Once these have been eliminated you can switch to a meadow cutting regime.



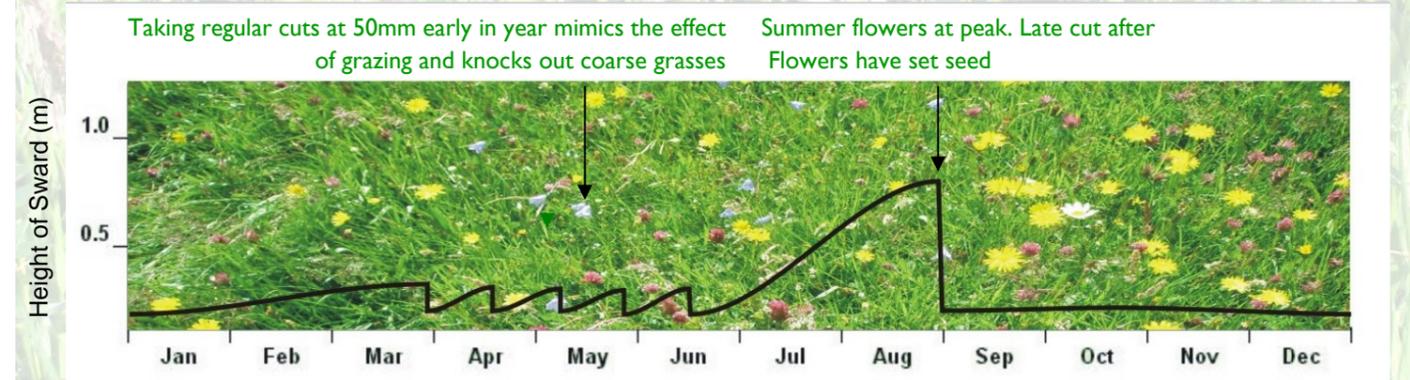
### Spring Meadow

This is the meadow that is at its best in spring. Flowers include pignut, cuckoo flower, meadow buttercup, marsh marigold, primrose and cowslip.



### Summer Meadow

This is the closest to the traditional haymeadow—at its best in mid July to August. Typical flowers include meadow cranesbill, common knapweed, field scabious and hawkbits.



**Remember - always rake up and remove the grass cuttings**

**Does your meadow look like this?** Here a fine even sward of grasses such as crested dog's tail, early flowering sweet vernal grass and fine meadow grasses, provide a backdrop to an abundance of colourful flowers.



**Or does it look dense, uneven and tussocky** with grasses such as false oat grass and cock's foot and highly competitive species such as Yorkshire fog, soft brome and creeping buttercup?

