**Creating Grass Margins**

- Late summer (August/September) is the best time to establish grass margins; use a higher seed rate if sowing in spring. Leave an area to regenerate naturally if you are sure that a perennial grass will develop without an infestation of weeds; otherwise, drill a native seed mix.
- Spray a heavy weed burden with glyphosate or glufosinate before cultivation.
- Three cuts may be necessary in the first summer (when the sward reaches 10 cm in height) to control weeds and encourage grasses to tiller. Do not leave swathes of cut grass lying on the award as this may suppress the growth of perennial grasses. Remove cuttings so a more diverse flora and fauna will develop.
- Prevent herbicides and fertiliser from drifting into the margin, as they will benefit competitive weeds over perennial grasses. Accurate fertiliser application, using pneumatic applicators or properly fitted detector plates on spinning disc applicators, will improve the ability of field margins to aid weed control in the crop margin.
- Insecticide drift harms any beneficial insects supported by the field margin.
- Treat bare裸 bromes in the grass margin selectively with an application of flazasip-P boasting in November (most perennial grasses will recover from this).
- When a grass ley forms part of the arable rotation, its grass margin should be kept and no fertiliser applied. Ideally, avoid grazing the margins from March to August.

**Types of Grass Margin**

- You can choose between two kinds of grass margin: the tussocky type for ground-nesting birds, and the wild flower type for nectar-feeding insects (see below).
- You might prefer to leave a sterile strip between the grass edge and the crop, although if you establish a perennial grass margin between a hedge base and the crop, this should not be necessary. Where you use such strips, they should be positioned between the grass margins and the crop.

**Tussocky Grass Margins for Nesting Birds and Over-Wintering Insects**

- One- or two-metre margins are sufficient to provide nesting cover. These should be located next to short, thick hedges, or boundaries with no hedge at all.
- Between 5 and 15% of cocklefoot or Timothy grass in the mix will create a tussocky afford ideal for nesting cover and protection for over-wintering insects. The mix can also include fescues and bent grass. Include up to 10% of perennial ryegrass to speed up the rate of establishment.
- After the first year, you should cut these margins once every three years, and only in the autumn. Avoid cutting all margins during the same year. For 6-metre margins, cut the 3 metres abutting the crop edge annually in the autumn, but only cut the hedge-side margin every three years; this will create a useful mix of grassland structure.

**Wildflower Margins to Attract Nectar-Feeding Insects**

- Create wild flower strips within a 6-metre margin in a sunny area. Well-used tracks are good sites as they are disturbed too often to make them suitable for the tussocky margins needed by nesting birds.
- Use a mix of fine grasses, such as fescues and bents. Wildflower seed should comprise between 5% and 20% of the mix by weight. Suitable native plants include yarrow, knapweed and ox-eye Daisy.
- You can achieve good establishment by drilling the grass seed and broadcasting the wild flower seed before rolling.
- After the first year, you should cut these margins annually in the autumn.

**Cultivated Margins to Conserve Rare Arable Plants**

- You should not establish grass margins on sites where rare arable plants, as this will suppress the germination of these dwindling populations. These types of plant need cultivation, as well as protection from herbicides and fertilisers.
- Cultivate the margin annually and leave it to regenerate without broad-spectrum herbicides or fertiliser. The best time for cultivation will depend on the germination time of the key plant species present.
- This type of management can give farmland birds a summer seed source on sites where any resultant weeds will not compromise the adjacent crop (such as on light, low-nutrient soils).

**Benefits for Wildlife**

- Grass margins can provide essential over-wintering habitat for many welcome insects and spiders, which will move into the crop in the spring and feed on crop pests. Wildflower strips will attract nectar-feeding insects, such as bumble bees and hoverflies, which will lay their eggs in nearby areas where there is an abundant supply of aphids for the larvae to feed on.
- Grass margins provide habitat for small mammals. Small mammal populations are already build up in wide grass margins, providing ideal hunting habitat for barn owls and kestrels. Wildlife margins away from roadsides can reduce the risk of barn owls being killed by road traffic.
- Cultivated margins can help conserve rare arable plant species.
- Many rare plants are now confined to the edges of arable fields. Careful management of these margins can help them without creating a significant weed burden at the edge of the crop. On light soils with low fertility, cultivated margins can provide seeds for farmland birds. Check sites carefully to prevent infestations of noxious weeds.
HOW CAN I CREATE AND MANAGE ARABLE FIELD MARGINS?

Many of these guidelines may be funded by Tir Gofal, the farming and wildlife advisory group for Wales. More info from:

**Arable field margins**

Field margins are the least productive areas of arable fields and can be turned into important wildlife habitats.

**BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE**

- **Grass margins can provide nesting sites for ground-nesting birds**
  - A tussocky grass strip can provide an ideal habitat for ground-nesting birds such as grey partridges, whinchat and yellowhammers.
- **Grass margins boost numbers of beneficial insects and spiders on arable farmland**
  - Tussocky grass margins can provide essential over-wintering habitat for many welcome insects and spiders which will move into the crop in the spring and feed on crop pests.
- **Grass margins can help conserve rare arable plant species**
  - Many rare plants are no longer common to arable fields. Careful management of these margins can help them without creating a significant weed burden at the edge of the crop.
  - Wild flower strips can help control crop pests. Wild flower strips at the edge of the crop will benefit nectar-feeding insects, such as bumble bees and hoverflies, which help to control crop pests.

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**TUSSOCKY GRASS MARGINS FOR NESTING BIRDS AND OVER-WINTERING INSECTS**

- One- or two-metre margins are sufficient to provide nesting cover. These should be located next to short, thick hedges, or boundaries with no hedge at all.
- Between 5% and 15% of cocksfoot or timothy grass in the mix will create a tussocky sward ideal for nestboxes and protection for over-wintering insects. The mix can also include sedges and bents. Include up to 10% of perennial ryegrass to speed up the rate of establishment.
- You should not establish grass margins on the adjacent crop (such as on light, low-nutrient soils).
- Cultivate the margin annually and leave it to infestations of noxious weeds.
- Cultivated margins can help conserve rare arable plant species.

**WILD FLOWER MARGINS TO ATTRACT NECTAR-FEEDING INSECTS**

- Create wild flower strips within a 6-metre margin in the sunny. Well-used tracks are good sites as they are disturbed too often to make them suitable for the tussocky margins needed by nesting birds.
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- You can achieve good establishment by drilling the grass seed and broadcasting the wild flower seed before sowing.
- After the first year, you should cut these margins annually in the autumn.

**KEY POINTS**

- Grass margins act as a barrier to weeds – stopping them from spreading beyond the hedge base and into the crop margin. – and encourage predatory insects, which helps to control crop pests.
- Tîr Gofal can fund many forms of field margin management.
- Wide margins act as ‘buffer strips’, reducing the drift of pesticides into watercourses, and so help farmers comply with pesticide label requirements.

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**GUIDELINES OVERLEAF**

**PREVENT HERBICIDES AND FERTILISER FROM DRIFTING INTO THE MARGIN**

- Spray a heavy weed burden with glyphosate.
- When a grass ley forms part of the arable rotation, its grass margins should be kept free from herbicides or fertiliser. The best time for cultivation will depend on the germination plant need cultivation, as well as protection from herbicides and fertilisers.
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**CREATE WILDFLOWER STRIPS WITHIN A 6-METRE MARGIN**

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