

# Don't mow, let it grow



Are you a mower or a grower....a Jay Gatsby or a Nick Carraway? In the book, not mowing his plot causes a rift between the two so annoying that the great Gatsby sends his gardener over to mow it for him. For some, mowing the lawn is an important civil responsibility, whereas for lawn dissenters it is just a noisy waste of time. That subtle yet unmistakable frontier where the closely shaved lawn rubs up against a shaggy one is a scar on the face of suburbia, an intolerable hint of trouble in paradise.

Throughout the glorious spring we have had this year I watched with complete joy the blooming of flowers and maturing grasses on amenity grassland areas which, pre-Covid, were usually strimmed and mowed by contractors. Verges that are normally just dust by June due to the unselective whip of the nylon strimmer were covered with flowers and, as we should all understand by now, flowers (weeds) mean insects and insects mean birds. A wildflower verge or un-mown patch of grass in your garden is undoubtedly better for nature. But whilst it may be more beautiful to some, it provokes an equally passionate response in those who like a more Telly Tubby-like landscape of order and "neatness".

There are plenty of areas that need to be kept short, for example safety sight lines along roadsides or footpaths, or areas for playing ball games and having picnics on. And it is definitely easier to find the dog poo if the grass is cut! If you are someone who is lucky enough to have a lawn or a verge to nurture perhaps think about leaving an area to grow for the summer and clear it in August or September. Don't mow it all because you have always mown it all, leave a strip under the hedge or a circle around the base of a fruit tree or your garden pond. You never know what might appear.

Scientists have suggested that people do not notice plants because they are stationary and the same colour. This form of cognitive bias is known as "plant blindness", an all too human tendency not to recognise the importance of plant life to the whole biosphere and human affairs: a philosophical view of plants as an inferior form of life. Undoubtedly some people do fail to appreciate the unique features or aesthetics of plants and prefer to look at a long strip of bare earth frequently sprayed with Roundup or strimmed....or perhaps they just don't look at all.

A survey of Brighton residents found that 70% of respondents agreed or "strongly" agreed that verges should be cut less frequently and that 87% of respondents wanted to be responsible for cutting the verges with their own tools. Things are different in a rural parish where some stretches of verge can run hundreds of metres

along individual property fronts. But we do have designated wildflower verges in our community that are managed for their plant life by the district council. If anything, people in the countryside should have as much, or even more, empathy and love for wild "untidy" nature and hopefully not always the desire to make it look like another area of creeping suburbia.

Visit the RSPB website for some helpful advice on lawns for wildlife. [www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/lawns-for-wildlife/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/lawns-for-wildlife/)

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