

The use of reinforcing net material in lawn turf and Wildflower Turf® products.



WILDFLOWER TURF®

PRODUCT | CONSULTANCY | TRAINING | RESEARCH

A brief background into turf development.

In the last fifty years the use of turf as a method of grassing areas has become mainstream. It provides users with an easy, quick and reliable method of creating lawned areas. In addition, turfing is the only viable option in some circumstances, particularly on slopes and where erosion control and soil stability is a key factor of the installation.

In recent years the demand for improved biodiversity and wildflower spaces has led to the development of a range of turf products for installing wildflower areas. This has become a successful and popular method of establishing wildflower areas in the built environment, and has numerous benefits for installers and customers as an alternative to seeding.

To meet the aspirations of the user, turf growers have historically integrated plastic netting into the turf for ease of handling as well as improving the stability and performance of the turf.

This is particularly true for the wildflower turf products on the market, where the low seeding rate makes the product less stable and more likely to disintegrate when handled.

Society's concern with plastic pollution.

However, with recent evidence of the growing amount of microplastics found in the environment, there has been a call for the reduction in the use of single-use plastics in society. This is evidenced

in single-use plastic carrier bags at supermarket checkouts and concerns over microplastic pollution from car tyres.

The issue of plastic pollution is now regarded seriously and plastic manufacturers, as well of those using plastic in products, are facing pressure to reduce, eliminate or find biodegradable alternatives. Very few industries are not affected by the issue of plastic pollution.

Most turf products are still produced with a non-biodegradable netting and **all** producers of a turf used to create wildflower spaces utilise a reinforcing structure to provide stability.

The Turfgrass Growers Association (TGA) has set a voluntary deadline for its members to eliminate the use of plastic in its turf by 2025.

What is Wildflower Turf Limited doing?

Wildflower Turf Limited is the only specialist grower of turf based wildflower products in the UK and the only grower with a dedicated Research Department. One key remit of the Research Department is to help the company find ways of delivering wildflower spaces in a sustainable manner.

Potential alternatives to plastic netting has been one focus of their research for a number of years. Some key findings from this research are:

- Due to the low seed rate and the reduced grass content in wildflower turf products, the need for a stabilising structure in Wildflower Turf® is still a key requirement.
- The structure of a 'net' (as opposed to a sheet) still provides the best re-enforcing structure for the growing and handling of Wildflower Turf®, allowing better plant growth and bulb emergence.

- Definitions of 'biodegradability' differ across suppliers, so it is important to ensure that an understanding of the term is clear and consistent.

- Research to date into alternatives to the plastic netting have produced inconclusive results, but some recent trials have shown promise.

- The successful development of a Wildflower Turf® product incorporating a biodegradeable membrane has been recently achieved. This unique product has been available since 2022.

- After feedback from customers, and after several years of working hard with suppliers, there are trials of at least three new materials as potential replacements for plastic netting.

- The team has played an important role in the development of an enhanced growing medium as an alternative to a turf product. This product has no need for reinforcement and shares many (but not all) of the advantages of a Wildflower Turf® product. 'MeadowscapePro™' is another product unique to Wildflower Turf Limited.



The Wildflower Turf Limited site in Hampshire

Addressing the broader environmental issues at Wildflower Turf Limited.

The issue of plastic pollution is only one of the environmental issues being addressed by the team at Wildflower Turf Limited. The company has an established environmental policy that highlights key issues and gives measurable targets to improve its sustainability performance. This is available to view from the company website at wildflowerturf.co.uk/about-us/environment-policy.

Some key environmental developments undertaken by Wildflower Turf Limited include:

- A policy of proactively working with key suppliers to improve all round environmental performance.
- A significant reduction in the use of peat in the products over the last two years and a robust and transparent plan to eliminate to use of peat in line with government guidelines.
- An open-door policy with customers to discuss any concerns they have, including free site tours.
- Recycling of waste plastics used in the production process.
- The installation of a 90kw array of solar panels generating carbon free energy since 2012.
- The move to low carbon electric vehicles, including directors' vehicles and vehicles used on the turf production site.
- A unique 'soil-less' system (which forms the basis of the Wildflower Turf® growing system) that releases zero carbon into the atmosphere due to the fact that there is no tilling in the process or removal of topsoil.

• A huge collection of easily accessible case studies and blogs available to all interested parties free of charge on the Wildflower Turf Ltd website.

What to do if your key focus is the sourcing of sustainable products from Wildflower Turf Limited?

- Engage with us! We are keen to work with all of our stakeholders to deliver the highest level of sustainability and set industry standards.
- Ask about the 'Bio' range of Wildflower Turf® products when speaking to the customer services team.
- Investigate the MeadowscapePro™ product range which is peat free and uses no reinforcing structure (and therefore no plastic) whilst delivering many of the benefits of Wildflower Turf®.
- Examine the numerous case studies and blogs on the Wildflower Turf Limited website to find out more information about products and installations where environmental issues were a key concern, and how these concerns were addressed.

Wildflower Turf® installation at Normand Park



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