



*natur wylt*  
*nature* *isn't* *neat*

CODE OF ACTION  
HANDBOOK



# What is Nature isn't Neat?

*It's an alternative way of managing grasslands in green spaces to benefit nature by creating meadow areas and being less 'tidy'. This lets wildflowers and grasses flower and grow and creates better habitats for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies.*

## WHY DO WE WANT TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT?

We are currently in a biodiversity and climate crisis and Wales is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. Since the 1980s, half of all our pollinator species have declined, and we've lost 97% of our wildflower meadows in less than one hundred years. Grasslands can store as much carbon as forests. Reducing mowing allows plants to grow bigger root systems, storing more carbon in the soil and helping combat the growing climate crisis. Better root systems increase soil aeration, making them more permeable to water and helping reduce flooding.

## WHY PUBLIC GREEN SPACES?

Green infrastructure includes parks, road verges, trees, amenity green spaces and more. Even though some of these patches can be small, they all add up to a big area. Green infrastructure also helps create connections across the landscape, allowing pollinators to move freely from flower to flower.



# Nature isn't Neat Approach

- *In as many areas as possible let wildflowers and grass grow throughout spring until they have flowered and set seed in summer.*
- *Then, cut and collect the arisings from late summer into autumn.*

This approach follows the lifecycle of the plants, and it is how wildflower meadows are traditionally managed.

Letting the flowers grow allows pollinators to forage on the nectar and pollen, giving them the energy needed to pollinate more flowers, including our fruit and vegetable crops. Long grass provides food for insects like grasshoppers and moths and provides more food for birds that feed on insects.

If left uncut, grasses and tough plants (e.g. thistles and docks) will begin to overcrowd more delicate wildflowers. Cutting annually prevents grass from becoming too dominant, and removing the cuttings takes some of the nutrients away from the soil, reducing their vigour. Further cuts can be taken throughout the autumn if required until the growing season begins again in early spring.

*Over time wildflowers will become more abundant and the area more attractive; please be patient though as this could take a few years.*

## OBJECTIVES

Create wildflower-rich habitats for pollinators across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's spaces

—  
Connect areas of existing habitats

—  
Increase diversity and abundance of pollinators in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough

## SPRING

## SUMMER

## AUTUMN

## CUT AND COLLECT



# Key Management Practices

HERE ARE THE KEY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE NATURE ISN'T NEAT APPROACH.



## VERGES AND MEADOW AREAS SHOULD BE LEFT UNCUT UNTIL SUMMER.

Identifying these areas with signage or stakes can help ensure they're not mown accidentally and make residents aware that they are unmown intentionally and not neglected or forgotten.

If it is not possible to leave meadow areas uncut until the summer, then leaving patches uncut for longer than usual in spring or reducing the number of cuts over the year will help to increase the number of flowers available for pollinators.

With a little bit of mowing, you can create interest and engagement with your meadows:

## RECREATIONAL AREAS AND PICNIC SITES

Create informal patches of mown areas for people to sit, relax and play games. You can be creative in these areas, mow wavy lines to make them interesting.

## DESIRE LINES

Where people have created their own paths by walking over the grass, keep these cut short to allow people to move easily.



THE NATURE ISN'T NEAT APPROACH IS FLEXIBLE AND CAN BE APPLIED TO ALL THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE YOU MANAGE OR BE SPECIFIED ON A SITE-BY-SITE BASIS.



RECREATION AREA

DESIRE LINE



# Some areas should be left uncut

## MESSY CORNERS

Along hedges or in corners, create areas of refuge for hedgehogs, slow worms and insects to overwinter.

## DRIP LINES OF TREES

Leave the area under the canopy uncut. This protects the roots and keeps the tree healthy. Join drip lines together to create connectivity.

*Did you know?  
Grasslands managed in this way can store as much carbon as forests.*



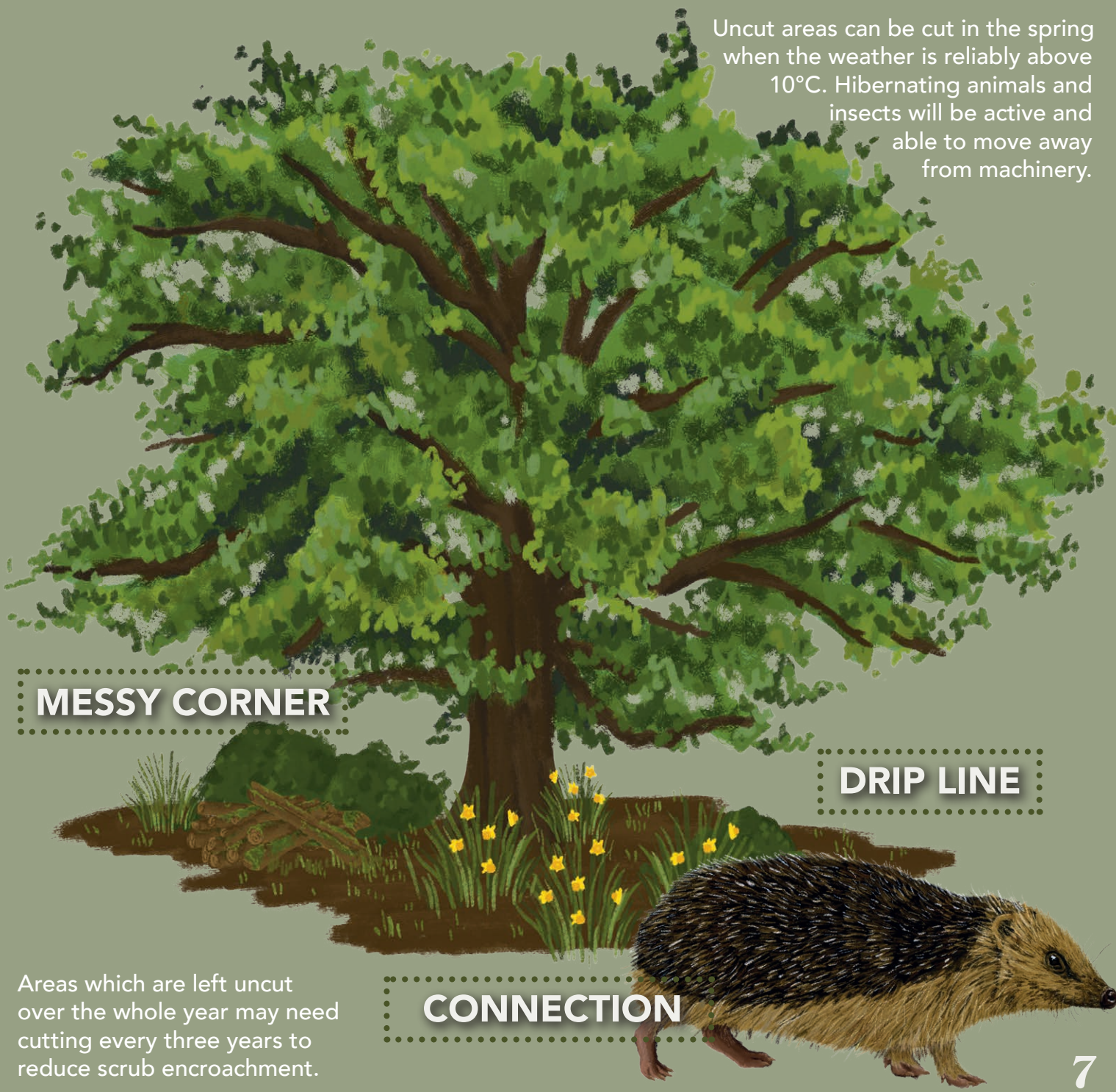
Uncut areas can be cut in the spring when the weather is reliably above 10°C. Hibernating animals and insects will be active and able to move away from machinery.

## MESSY CORNER

## DRIP LINE

## CONNECTION

Areas which are left uncut over the whole year may need cutting every three years to reduce scrub encroachment.





# Areas that should be cut frequently

## EDGES OF PATHS AND PAVEMENTS

A mown border of roughly 1 - 2 metres maintains a safe walkway and delineates the meadow areas making them a feature

## VISIBILITY SPLAYS

Verges on road junctions and roundabouts to be mown to maintain visibility for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians

## RECREATIONAL AREAS

Such as play areas and sports pitches, make sure to leave a border (for people to stand and spectate) and connecting paths to access the area

If you are planning to cut frequently if at all possible, try to avoid areas with lots of flowers. Consider whether these areas could have altered management in future years

## PRE-CUT WALK OVER

Before mowing, you should walk over the area to remove litter.

This also helps to let any small animals know you are there so that they can move away before you begin cutting.

**VISIBILITY SPY**

**PATH EDGE**



# More Mown



# Less Mown



# End-of-season strategies

AT THE END OF THE SUMMER, THERE CAN BE LARGE VOLUMES OF GRASS TO CUT AND COLLECT IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

IT'S USEFUL TO SLOWLY REDUCE THE AMOUNT THAT'S REMAINED UNCUT OVER THE SUMMER BY ROTATIONAL OR INCREMENTAL CUTTING.

Whatever is left remaining can then be removed with a final cut and collected at the end of the season.

These strategies create areas of grassland with different heights. These areas will favour different species and help contribute to the biodiversity benefit of the Nature isn't Neat approach.

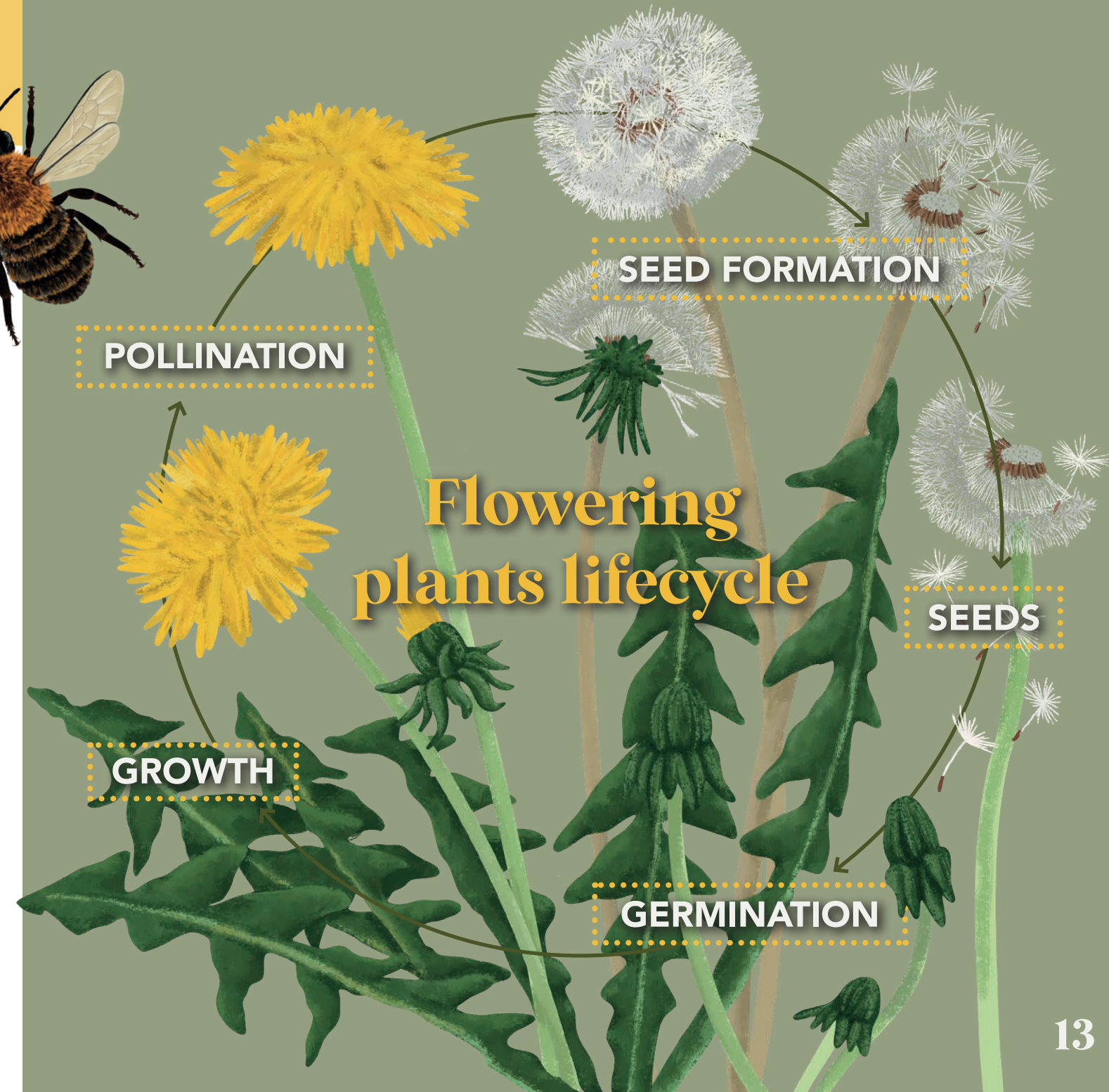
Although you will be reducing the number of wildflowers in your green spaces, there is usually a second flowering of the plants after they have been cut, so there will still be forage available for the pollinators.

These strategies are best started once most flowers have set seed so that they are able to complete their lifecycle and increase the number of wildflowers next year.

*Ideally, don't cut all of your meadow areas too early, the more that can be retained in large open spaces into the autumn, the better.*

*Cuttings should be removed from site and disposed of as green waste. Removing cuttings every year gradually takes nutrients away from the soil, preventing grass from growing too high and overcrowding more delicate wildflowers.*

*If you're unable to remove cuttings from site, you can dispose of small amounts in discrete piles along hedgerows and banks.*





# Rotational Cut

Cut and collect alternate patches of grass with a raised mower roughly every eight weeks during the summer.

This creates patches of short, medium, and taller grass whilst reducing the overall volume of the cuttings.



Raising the height of the mower protects low-growing flowers, while the break between mows allows flowers to bloom in between cuts.

# Incremental Cut



LATE SPRING



EARLY SUMMER



LATE SUMMER



Every 4 – 8 weeks, cut and collect strips or patches out of unmown areas, working inwards from mown areas. It is best to begin incrementally reducing areas in summer, and you can continue into autumn. Once mown, areas can be kept short.

Along paths and road verges, it is best to work outwards from the edge taking linear strips. Recreation spaces can be expanded using an incremental approach, and mowing patches can be an opportunity to create more recreation and picnic areas in large spaces.



# Ferne Creative

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fernecreative.com



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