



Making a Meadow, Episode 2: **Assessing Your Site**

This companion document to the *Making a Meadow* series provides more information about meadow restoration: assessing site conditions

When creating a meadow, it is important to understand your site's growing conditions before you start planting. Conditions like soil moisture and light availability determine which plants will grow best in this location, which will change the appearance of the meadow. For example, a meadow at a dryer sunny site will look different than a meadow created on a wet shady site. Cultural factors are also important, such as restrictions on vegetation height often imposed by homeowners associations.

Following are key factors to consider when assessing your site's growing conditions:

- ❖ Light Availability: How much light does your lawn get?
 - Is it full sun, receiving at least 6 hours direct sunlight?
 - Is it partially shaded, receiving at least 3 hours of direct sunlight or longer periods of dappled light?
 - Are there tall trees in your yard that could create shady areas?
- ❖ Soil Moisture: How wet is the soil? What are the drainage conditions?
 - Are there big puddles of standing water after a rain that persist for hours?
 - Wet, poorly drained sites are best suited for wetland or riparian meadow plant communities
 - Do you have to water your existing lawn frequently to keep it green?
 - Dry, well-drained sites are best suited to upland plant communities
 - Somewhere in the middle?
 - Lawns usually have average soil moisture conditions, making them suitable for a wide variety of meadow plants
- ❖ What is the composition of your soil?
 - Are there areas with compacted or heavy clay soil?
 - Is your soil sandy or gravelly?
 - Do you use fertilizer?
 - Some meadow plants grow best in dry, rocky soil, others in wet, clay soils. Past construction and excavation can drastically change soil conditions. It is vital to understand soil composition before selecting meadow plants.
- ❖ What is the shape of your lawn?
 - Is it long and thin, or blocky?

- In general, the bigger and blockier a meadow is, the less weed pressure there will be on the edges of the meadow
 - Thin meadows, such as a strip along a driveway, are more susceptible to weeds creeping in from the edges, so it is often best to plant taller, more “aggressive” meadow species to better compete with weeds
- ❖ What plants do you have on your property that could cause problems in your meadow?
 - Are there invasive species present on your property that could cause future issues when you plant your meadow?
 - See the Central New York weed guide on our website for help with identification of common yard weeds and to understand which species are problematic and which can be ignored
 - Remember, a “weed” is simply a plant out of place, and many plants that arrive on their own in your meadow are actually beneficial
 - Some plants are called “invasive” because they outcompete desirable plants, but just being exotic does not make a species invasive – many native plants can be invasive too!
- ❖ Are there any cultural restrictions?
 - Do you have a homeowners association in your neighborhood that would prevent you from having certain types or heights of vegetation?
 - Meadows can be very tall or very short, so before you consider breaking the rules think about using plant species that fit within these restrictions
- ❖ Are there any ecologically sensitive features near your property?
 - Do you live on the shore of a lake?
 - Do you have a stream that runs through your property?
 - Do you live near a wetland?
 - All of these features can affect both the plant composition of the meadow you will create and will inform how to approach the next important step in the meadow making process: clearing the current vegetation.
- ❖ What are your expectations?
 - Do you have certain flowers or grasses you would like in your meadow?
 - Is there a certain way you want your meadow to look in terms of color, height, “tidiness,” or other features?

Next time we will discuss designing a seed mix for your meadow including how to choose species that suit your growing conditions and the type of meadow you want, how to think of your meadow in terms of its structure, and where to buy seed for your meadow restoration projects.

Feel free to reach out to us with any questions at:

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