



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Set-aside 2004

Set-aside was introduced in 1992 as a production control measure. The rules governing the management of set-aside have evolved over the years and now contain clauses that can help farmers support wildlife on the farm. Plan your set-aside regime to suit your farming system and complement your existing habitats to benefit the environment.

There are two main categories of set-aside – rotational and non-rotational. Rotational set-aside tends to produce more annual plants, seeds, pollen, nectar and food for insects, small mammals and birds, whereas non-rotational set-aside can be used to provide a more stable habitat. Try to include a mixture of both types of set-aside to increase the wildlife potential of your farm.



Naturally re-generated set-aside after cereals can provide over-wintering shelter, food and nectar sources for many animals

Future Changes

Set-aside regulations are likely to develop further over time. Seek advice about the latest regulations and restrictions governing set-aside in your country and plan accordingly. It seems likely that the minimum width requirement for set-aside will be reduced to 5 metres at field margins, if they provide an environmental benefit. At the time of writing this has not been ratified.

Rotational Set-aside

Rotational set-aside can provide an excellent over-wintering habitat for insects, birds and small mammals. Natural regeneration, especially after cereals, is usually sufficient to create the required green cover and produce enough plant varieties to benefit a range of wildlife. In some cases sown mixtures will be needed to establish a good green cover, especially when creating habitat for specific species such as game birds. Seek advice from FWAG or The Game Conservancy Trust.

Management advice for rotational set-aside to benefit wildlife

- Try to destroy the green cover as late as possible.
- Spraying is preferable to cutting as it is less damaging to ground nesting birds. If cutting is required, try not to cut before August.
- Delay cultivations for as long as possible.
- Consider leaving a 2 metre strip around the headlands unsprayed or uncut. This is currently allowable under set-aside rules.
- If sowing a seed mixture try to use native species unless very specific nectar or seed sources are required.

Non-rotational Set-aside

Well-sited non-rotational set-aside can be a very important habitat on the farm.



Non-rotational set-aside can be an important habitat for wildlife on less-productive areas of the farm

Siting advice

- Use those fields and part fields that are the least productive across the farm.
- Use set-aside as a means of extending existing areas of wildlife importance.
- Aim to link together areas of wildlife importance.
- Use set-aside as a buffer for sensitive habitats or features. Currently 10 metres strips are allowed when adjoining watercourses or lakes. Take advantage of this excellent opportunity to reduce contamination risk to watercourses from fertilisers and pesticide residues and remove the need for a LERAPS assessment.
- Use set-aside to protect ancient monuments and historical features.

Management advice for non-rotational set-aside to benefit wildlife

- Natural regeneration will often be sufficient to generate green cover, however sowing a seed mixture may be beneficial in some circumstances. If you are hoping to attract particular animals, such as butterflies, game birds, or bumble bees, seek advice on which species mix to sow.
- If using a seed mixture try to include wild flowers – they are a good source of nectar and pollen. Use native seeds where possible.
- Select a range of plants flowering at different times of the year, to provide nectar and pollen for as many months as possible.
- Up to 25% of each non-rotational set-aside area can be left uncut in each year and 10% permanently. Seek advice as to which areas will benefit most from this strategy.
- As with rotational set-aside, try to leave the permitted 2m strip around the field edges.
- Use targeted spot spraying or weed wiping to treat pernicious weed problems, such as ragwort, thistle and docks.



Wild flowers provide nectar and pollen sources

Make full use of derogations. A special designation, multiannual set-aside, is available for set-aside with particular environmental benefits such as protecting archaeological features or cultivated areas for lapwings. This requires a specific management plan approved by DEFRA. Seek advice from your local FWAG Adviser.

Further Information

For further information including possible grant aid contact your local FWAG Adviser and visit Farmland Biodiversity, Research Vision and Environmentally Responsible Farming sections at www.fwag.org.uk