

You can help Marsh Mallow conservation...

The Marsh Mallow plant, *Althea officinalis* was once abundant around Rye, but it has become quite local. It is an attractive plant with medicinal and culinary interest and it is also good for insects.

The Marsh Mallow Moth *Hydraecia osseola hucherardi*, also known as the Giant Ear, is dependent on this plant and was discovered in Britain in 1951. It was first found at Hailsham, East Sussex, but was last seen there in 1952. It is currently confined to a few sites in Kent and on the Kent/Sussex border. The name 'Hydraecia' means 'water-dwelling', in reference to the damp areas inhabited by this and other members of the genus, and the species name 'osseola' means 'of bone', referring to the background wing coloration.

Download a fact sheet from

http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/uploads/marsh_mallow_moth.pdf

How you can help

You can help us to increase the number of plants at selected locations in Rye Bay by growing plants in pots to be returned to us in early September for planting out. Seeds can be collected from Lime Kiln Cottage at Rye Harbour Nature Reserve.

Location - <http://www.multimap.com/s/zWz7qam0>

Or, we can post seeds to you. Please let us know how many pots you can produce.

Growing Marsh Mallow From Seed

by Dorothy Norman & Ron Nash

As far as a method is concerned, I think the best advice we can give is not to start too early! Having done it now for several years, we realise that if you plant the seeds too soon, they need an extra potting-on or else go very leggy by September. So we don't plant the seeds until mid-May and that way they can survive in 3.5 inch (about 9 cm) pots until you plant them out. We sow the seeds thinly in ordinary potting compost (John Innes or similar), either in trays or small pots, covering them with a layer of compost, no more than 5 mm thick. Water well and cover the pots/trays with cling-film or polythene to keep in the moisture. Place on a warm window sill or greenhouse and wait for germination which is usually about a week. Once they are large enough - 2-4 true leaves showing - prick them out into 3.5 inch pots using the same type of compost. Place all the pots in trays so that they can be kept moist - once they get a root system established, they need regular watering. Until they get going, we keep them in a sheltered spot - a cold frame would be ideal if available. Once they look hardy enough, the trays can be placed anywhere outside (where the rabbits can't nibble them though!) If they begin to look a bit yellow as the months go by, we give them a liquid feed of fertilizer. If they get too tall, we just nip out the tops.

Thank-you for helping with this project.

barry.yates@eastsussex.gov.uk