



Warwickshire

# Wildlife Gardening



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Creating a Living Landscape

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The Gardens Go Wild Project is part of the Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER programme aims to support a programme of actions that bring people together in communities in the rural parishes of Warwick District and Rugby Borough.

The project aims are to encourage more people to consider wildlife in their gardens, allotments and community green spaces. We will be providing support and information, and rewarding villages for the positive steps they take to improve their green spaces for wildlife. **FREE** Activities as part of the project will include:

- Information packs
- Awards Events for villages with wildlife gardens/green spaces
- Wildlife gardening and allotments talks
- Community planting events
- A bi- monthly newsletter
- Opportunities for young people to assist older people with improving and maintaining local community green spaces
- Sessions in after school clubs to talk about wildlife gardening.
- Setting up demonstration gardens in Monks Kirby and Bishops Tachbrook

This booklet is designed to be part of the Gardens Go Wild Information pack on Wildlife Gardening. You can find more detailed information on some of the things in this booklet as separate factsheets and leaflets within the pack.



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## Why are wildlife gardens important?

- We have over 270,000 hectares of gardens in the UK, that's more than all the National Nature Reserves put together.
- They provide wildlife with food and shelter.
- Some declining species are particularly well suited to gardens and are becoming more reliant on them. These include house sparrows, bumblebees, frogs, pipistrelle bats and hedgehogs.
- Gardens are often linked to other areas of habitat such as grass verges, school grounds, parks and churchyards. This habitat network is important in allowing species to move around in response to climate change.
- We can manage our gardens in sustainable ways by harvesting rainwater, going peat-free and by composting.
- They help to absorb and retain water, thereby reducing the risk of flooding.
- Ponds, trees and shrubs act as carbon sinks, absorbing and retaining carbon from the atmosphere.
- Gardens are a great place for us to get close to and inspired by wildlife.



## Getting started

We can all lend a hand to our local wildlife by making small changes to the way we manage our gardens. Planting more trees and shrubs, making a log pile, digging a small pond and leaving areas of long grass can all make a big difference.

You may be starting from a blank canvas or (and more likely) you will be working with what you've already got in your garden, either way there are plenty of things you can do to create or enhance a garden for wildlife.

## Work With Nature

One of the first principles of designing gardens for wildlife is to work with nature rather than against it. When planning for a wildlife garden bear in mind what it is that nature 'wants to do' and try to complement it. A great deal of the wildlife attracted to gardens is, in the wider countryside, to be found in the woodland edge and hedgerow communities. This is because the structure of our gardens tends to resemble the structure found there: garden shrubs and trees generally receive a good deal of light like those in the woodland edge and our flower borders and areas of grass resemble the adjacent field margin or woodland glade.



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## Butterflies

In Warwickshire, flower-filled meadows are now a rarity and across England around 97% of flower-rich meadows have been lost, so it's no surprise that many butterfly species are in trouble. Anything we can do to help butterflies in our gardens not only aids their conservation but can also add to the pleasure of being outside in the garden.

Most butterflies are on the wing between March to October so having a wide range of nectar-rich plants in flower from early spring to late summer is the best way of bringing butterflies to your garden. Choose warm, sheltered, sunny positions for your 'butterfly plants'. Always choose single flowered varieties. A mixture of flowers provides food for a wide range of insects.

When planning an area for butterflies, you need to ensure that there is enough of each flower to make a visible display and to give off enough scent to attract the species. Warmth and shelter is important too, so ensure that you place your plants out of the wind - in a sun trap if possible. Food plants for caterpillars should be included to support the butterfly during all phases of its life cycle.

Put your butterfly border against a south-facing wall to absorb heat and give tired butterflies a chance to warm up. In the sun at the front of the border you can put a 'basking stone' a large upturned flowerpot

*Please see "Butterfly Gardening" factsheet for more information*

## Bumblebees

Summer wouldn't be summer without the gentle buzzing of bees. Bees are vital pollinators in our gardens, but sadly many bee species are under threat. You can help bumblebees by making your garden 'bee friendly'.

The key to attracting bumblebees to your garden is providing a good source of nectar for adult bees to feed on and pollen to feed bumblebee larvae. In the ideal bumblebee world a garden should have nectar and pollen-rich flowers growing in it from February through to October. Bumblebee species have different tongue lengths, so require different flowers to feed on. Some have relatively short tongues and prefer to feed on flowers such as white clover and bird's-foot trefoil, whereas others have long tongues and prefer long-tubed flowers such as honeysuckle.

*Please see "Garden Bumblebees" factsheet and Artificial nests for more information*

Birds are amongst the most successful creatures on the planet. They have colonised everywhere from the bleakest Arctic to the sweltering Equator and are often so common that we don't notice them. They are, without doubt, creatures that a gardener should befriend as they can help keep down the amount of insect pests in your garden far more effectively than any spray.

A well designed garden, or group of gardens, can support whole families of sparrows, treecreepers, robins, and thrushes, as well as visiting birds from nearby parks and woods. As well as a bird table, your perfect bird garden will provide shelter, natural food, nesting space and safe highways around the neighbourhood. Even in the smallest garden, planting seed- or fruit-bearing plants will attract birds. The varieties you pick depend on the size of your garden. However, if you have room, do consider small trees or shrubs – these provide cover for birds roosting overnight and you may be lucky enough to have them nesting.

Many species can benefit from the addition of an artificial home for them in your garden. These include boxes for birds and bats, hedgehog and frog homes, even a mini beast hotel!

### **Put up a nest box**

It is possible to encourage many different species of birds into your garden and there are many different designs of boxes available to buy. However, it is simple enough to make your own from a single piece of wood, a few nails and some roof felt. Remember that you need to remove the old nest material during the winter, so the roof or one of the sides needs to be hinged or removable to give you access to the nest box.

### **Help home-building garden birds**

Come springtime garden birds start the frantic search for materials to build and insulate the perfect nest. You can give them a hand by putting out suitable nesting materials. Try hanging bundles of straw, fine sticks, shredded woollen jumpers and bunches of grasses close to your feeding station. Your bundles should last through to the summer season of second broods.

### **Bumblebee nests**

Many bumblebees will use old mouse or vole holes as nest sites. Log piles, compost heaps, dry piles of dead leaves, tussocky grass areas, hedges and sunny banks with dry crumbly soil will all provide good nesting sites for bumblebees.

*Please see “Making and Installing nest boxes for Gardens Birds”, “Making and Installing bat boxes in the Garden”, “Creature Features”, factsheets for more information*



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## Put up some bird feeders

One of the easiest steps you can take is to set up a bird table. This can be really simple, a platform hanging from a tree or supported on a post. A lip around the table will prevent food from blowing away but remember to leave gaps in the corners of the lip to allow drainage. The main thing is to site your table where cats cannot get to it, either by climbing up or leaping from a nearby branch. Also you may have a problem with squirrels trying to raid the table. Another option is to use one of the commercially available bird feeders which are designed to stop squirrels – these can be purchased from a local garden centre. Whatever feeder you use, remember to clean it regularly (at least weekly) to avoid the risk of spreading disease.

## Which bird food should I use?

Once you begin putting out a supply of food, birds from quite a wide area will get used to your routine and turn up expecting it, so it is better to feed at regular times each day, especially in winter. Birds love kitchen scraps such as grated cheese, bits of apple, oats, black sunflower seeds – even mealworms. High energy foods such as fat balls can be particularly useful in the winter months.

Peanuts should not be offered loose, particularly in the breeding season as parent birds have been reported feeding them to nestlings and choking them. Also it is important to remove old peanuts from feeders as they develop a toxic chemical as they get older and can kill the birds you are trying to help.

## Placing your Feeding Station

- Where you can watch it from a window or hidden bench.
- Away from bird boxes - birds are territorial and will not appreciate the company.
- Among, or very near, thorny cover to hide in.
- Away from sturdy trees, open fences and other cat-leaps.

## Water

If you are going to provide food, don't forget water. All birds need water to keep their feathers clean and to drink. A bird bath is a wonderful focus for a garden, but could be replaced by a cheaper pot stand or shallow bowl. A shallow dish of water on your bird table will allow all who dine to drink as well. Fill your bird bath with water collected in a water butt. Change the water in your bird bath regularly - birds do not like using their friends' bathwater. Make sure you rinse the bath out too.

*Please see "Feeding Garden Birds" factsheet for more information*

Most of our wildflower meadows have disappeared in recent years. These meadows provided homes for many colourful wildflowers as well as butterflies, bees, grasshoppers and many other creatures.

Although old meadows can never be recreated, you can develop a colourful wildflower meadow in your own garden. It does not have to occupy the whole garden but could be as little as a narrow strip fringing the lawn.

## A mini-meadow in your garden

A mini-meadow in your garden will provide a damp environment for hunting frogs and toads, delicate grasses for specialist butterflies to lay their eggs on, and a home for grasshoppers and crickets. A larger meadow might give you a home for moles and could attract goldfinches. Old meadows and pasture land are a wonderful part of our countryside. They are fragile habitats where grasses and wildflowers grow, rare butterflies breed, and small mammals forage. While many animals depend on these meadows, they are a man-made environment. Centuries of grazing and cropping have led to an extremely poor soil, which does not become woodland because of ongoing grazing.

If you want to turn a piece of lawn into a meadow, the simplest way is to give the mower a rest and let your lawn grow during the summer to see what turns up (a good flower identification book will help). You may find that only buttercups and daisies appear, so you may have to introduce some plants yourself. This can be done by “over seeding” but you can also plant wildflowers directly into the lawn

## Seeds

One option for creating a meadow is to sow seeds in the autumn. Remove squares of turf and top soil and compost them. Then apply two or three types of wildflower seed to the bare earth. This works much better than simply scattering seed into your existing lawn.

## Plug Plants

If you want instant results wildflowers can be introduced into lawns as pot grown plants. Plant them in small groups, in the autumn, to give the roots a chance to establish. Where possible it is better to use local varieties of plants as these have adapted to local conditions. You can either grow the plants yourself from seed or purchase them from plant nurseries

*Please see “Wildflower Meadows” factsheet for more information*



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Ponds are a threatened habitat - the number in the UK is estimated to have declined by over a third from the 1940s to the 1980s. Garden ponds help to reduce this loss and provide beauty and interest close to home.

A pond is an essential feature of any garden hoping to attract wildlife and can provide a refuge for many species of freshwater plants and animals including frogs, toads, newts, insects and birds. Size does not matter to water-loving creatures and they will find your pond within days whether it is an old sink or a properly-constructed freshwater habitat.

## A Few Key Points

- Site your pond in a sunny, sheltered spot where sun should reach it for most of the day
- Create a wildflower bank or rockery with the soil you dig out
- Make it as large as possible as this is better for wildlife and easier to maintain.
- It will need to be at least 75cm to 1 metre deep at one point to prevent it freezing over completely in the winter
- Incorporate gently sloping sides to allow animals to get in and out, plus shelves or ledges to provide variation in depth and provide a surface for pot plants.
- Ponds can be dug at most times of the year but a pond started in spring will establish more quickly than at other times.
- The best type of liner for a garden pond is a flexible liner such as polythene, PVC or butyl rubber.

## Plants

Plants are vital components of a wildlife pond as they provide both habitat and food for a host of animal species. The aim should be to have much of the water surface covered by a good variety of plants and a complicated underwater system of roots, stems and leaves, as this will support the highest diversity of animal species. Water plants fall into four categories: submerged, floating leaf, emergent, and bog and

marginal plants. Examples of native species to use when planting up a new pond are: Submerged plants –

curled pondweed, water starwort, water crowfoot and water milfoil; Floating leaf plants – frogbit,

floating sweet-grass, broad-leaved pondweed and yellow water lily;

Emergents – water forget-me-not, amphibious bistort, arrowhead,

bogbean, water mint and water plantain; Bog and marginal plants –

purple loosestrife, marsh marigold, ragged robin, bugle and marsh woundwort.



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*Please see "Wildlife Pond Pack" factsheet for more information*

Wildlife gardeners try to aim for a harmonious balance of plants and animals which fluctuates through the years, but does not allow one species to dominate at the expense of others. There is some confusion about the relationship between wildlife gardening and controlling problem wildlife, and to a certain extent this may be down to your individual interpretation. As soon as you suspect you have a problem with an animal in your garden:



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- Establish what it is
- Establish whether the animal is actually causing any damage
- Make your choice about what to do

## Foxes

Foxes can be rather untidy animals, and will dig for worms, eat fruit and buds. If you mind this and don't want too much fox activity in your garden:

- Cover any bare soil with chicken wire or mesh pegged down
- Bring indoors anything that you mind foxes playing with
- Use a commercial deterrent like Renardine, or an ultrasonic repellent.
- Block up any gaps under sheds or steps that might be used for an earth between October and January - either making sure that there are no foxes inside, or using a one-way hinge to allow them out but not back in

## Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails are eaten by hedgehogs, frogs, toads, slow worms, lizards, ground beetles, and various birds. Small slugs are also eaten by harvestmen and centipedes. Encouraging these predators into your garden will reduce the number of slugs and snails.

If you use slug pellets, or other molluscicides, you face a very high risk of poisoning the helpful animals when they eat a recently poisoned slug or snail. Slug pellets can also poison food plants if laid next to them, and should not be used where children or pets might eat them. They are all round nasty things, so avoid them at all cost!

## Squirrels

Although grey squirrels are not native animals, they are fun to watch. They can be deterred from bird feeders by mixing chilli powder or 'squirrel away' in with the food, or you can make a squirrel proof feeder as a challenge. They are often particularly hungry in springtime if they dig up crocuses, try planting colchicums or daffodils instead.

*Please see "Pest or Guest" and "Snail and Slug Control" factsheets for more information*



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By keeping good records of the wildlife in your garden and comparing them year to year you can build up valuable information. It will help you find out how well wildlife is doing, and also tell you if your neighbourhood is improving. It can encourage your friends and neighbours to see it is worthwhile looking after wildlife in their gardens. Also, many professional ecologists are becoming increasingly interested in the distribution of garden wildlife as this can help to measure any decline or increase in species that are good indicators of a healthy environment.

## How should you record?

Any way you feel comfortable with, although it is a good idea to be consistent - here are some ideas to choose from:

- Keep a nature notebook, with records, drawings, pressed plants and sketches
- Keep a simple wildlife watching book and fill it in when you remember
- Take photos of fixed points in the garden, unusual beasties, and works in progress. Date them and compile a scrapbook
- Keep a desk diary and insist on writing something in every day -even if it is simply about the view from the window
- Use the dated pages to write tasks ahead of time
- Make a map of your garden, photocopy four copies for the year, use one to record your plans for the year, one for your long term plans, one to keep as it is and one to record the work you carry out. At the end of the year redraw the base map and start again for the next

If you need inspiration there are a few places in Warwickshire Where you can do to see examples of wildlife Gardens and get ideas.

- Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Coventry. <http://www.warwickshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk> (Currently called the sensory garden, the area due to be enhanced shortly)
- Garden Organic, Ryton. <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>
- Many of the gardens that take part in the NGS gardens open for charity scheme are wildlife friendly. <http://www.ngs.org.uk/>

Currently in Development as part of the Gardens Go Wild project. These gardens are open to the public on selective days, please contact us to find out more.

- The Revel Primary School, Monks Kirby
- Bishops Tachbrook Primary School

A vast array of supplies for wildlife friendly gardens can be purchased at Brandon Marsh Nature Centre. Local garden centres are also increasingly stocking wildlife gardening products.

## Specialist Suppliers

### Naturescape

Native British Wild Flowers

Maple Farm, Coach Gap Lane, Langar, Notts Tel: 01949 860592

[www.naturescape.co.uk](http://www.naturescape.co.uk)

### Emorsgate Seeds

Terington Court, Popes Lane, Terrington St Clement, Norfolk PE34 4N.

Tel: 01553 829028

[www.wildseed.co.uk](http://www.wildseed.co.uk)

**The Wildlife Friendly Award Scheme** is a way to recognise your hard work in encouraging wildlife into your garden.

As part of the Gardens Go Wild project, people are encouraged to apply for individual award as well as getting together with other people from their village and apply for a village award.

The application process is simple and easy to do so apply now!

## Factsheets

Other factsheets included in this pack that have not already been mentioned are:

- *Organic Gardening*
- *Cunning Containers*
- *Hedges for Wildlife*
- *Making Compost*
- *Organic Gardening*
- *Trees and Shade Plants*

These can also be found on the Wild About Gardens website, together with a wealth of other information. This is a joint venture with The Wildlife Trusts and the RHS.

[www.wildaboutgardens.org](http://www.wildaboutgardens.org)



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**Warwickshire Wildlife Trust** is one of 47 Wildlife Trusts across the UK working to achieve the shared aim of securing a better future for wildlife.

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