

Gardening for wildlife

getting you started

Wildlife needs four things if it's to thrive in your garden – food, water, shelter and a place to breed. By providing some, if not all of these things you will bring your garden to life. Here are some ideas to get you started and help you make a difference for wildlife, whatever the size of your garden.

Butterfly gardens

Butterflies bring beauty to any garden. Attract them with nectar-rich flowers like verbena, scabious and ice-plant. Go for plants with simple flowers that make it easy for butterflies to get at the nectar. Avoid double-flowered varieties of plants which may have no nectar. Many cottage garden flowers are suitable. Plant in a sheltered sunny spot and don't forget to provide food plants for caterpillars too.

(See the box below for plant suggestions)

Go organic

You can have an attractive and productive garden without using chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

You can make and use your own compost, encourage insect and slug-eating creatures and adapt natural processes to maintain your soil.

Gardeners' friends include frogs and toads, birds, and small mammals like bats and hedgehogs – all of which eat insects or slugs. Ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies feast on aphids.

Native trees

Favour native trees, but remember other species can be good for wildlife too.

Trees: alder, ash, aspen, beech, birch, bird cherry and wild cherry, crab apple, field maple, hazel, holly, juniper, oak, Scot's pine, rowan, yew, whitebeam, willow, wych elm.

Shrubs: alder buckthorn, blackthorn, buckthorn, broom, dog-rose, dogwood, elder, guelder-rose, hawthorn, spindle.

Climbing plants

Climbing plants on fences and walls make nesting and roosting sites for birds, and a haven for insects and small animals. Choose plants like quince and honeysuckle which have nectar-rich flowers followed by fruit. Make sure you have some evergreens too; ivy is especially valuable.

Hedges

Hedges provide living space and food for all sorts of wildlife, as well as privacy and security for you. Good native choices include hawthorn, blackthorn, wild rose, holly, hazel and elder. In addition, berberis and pyracantha produce lots of berries for the birds.

Peat-free gardening

Peat bogs are very special places for wildlife but, partly due to gardeners' demand for peat, nearly all have been destroyed in the UK. Help save our remaining bogs by using peat-free composts and mulches, such as chipped bark, leaf mould or coir. Contact The Wildlife Trusts for details of where to buy peat-free products.

Cracks and crevices

Many plants grow on walls, including ivy-leaved toadflax, various ferns, red valerian and, of course, wallflower. Spiders and solitary bees like nooks and crannies, and rockeries will shelter many small creatures. Hollow stems left over the winter provide homes for insect larvae and pupae.

Meadow magic

A meadow makes a wonderful alternative to plain grass on your lawn and brings vibrant colour to any garden. It can be difficult to make a meadow from scratch, especially as you need to reduce nutrient levels in your soil.

A good alternative is to plant meadow flowers as plugs into your lawn, but be prepared to alter your mowing pattern to allow the flowers to grow. Generally cowslip, ox-eye daisy, meadow cranesbill, yellow rattle, self-heal and meadow buttercup do well.

Feeding birds

Different species of birds eat different things in different ways and places. Provide nuts, seeds, fat and kitchen scraps in feeders, trays and on the ground. Insect eaters will appreciate mealworms sprinkled on the ground or in fat. Move feeding places from time to time to guard against predators, disease and unwelcome visitors such as rats.

Remember that water is vitally important, so if you have a bird bath or pond keep it topped up and ensure it's ice-free on cold winter days.

Bird boxes

Tits and nuthatches need boxes with a 28mm entrance hole, house sparrows around 32mm. Open-fronted boxes attract robins and flycatchers. Large open-fronted boxes high in trees may attract owls or kestrels.

Do not put boxes in full sun, and do site them away from places that predators might attack from, such as overhanging branches.

Compost bins

Make your own natural fertiliser. Compost garden waste and vegetable kitchen scraps in a home-made box or bought compost bin. If you have limited space, you can still make compost in a small 'worm bin' in your house or back yard.

Pile of logs

A pile of logs in a shady corner will feed beetle larvae and shelter many other animals, including frogs, toads and slow worms. The rare stag beetle needs dead wood to breed in. Hedgehogs often hibernate in wood piles, so if you're having a bonfire, check for sleeping hedgehogs first.

Nettle feeders

Nettles are the food plant of the caterpillars of some beautiful butterflies: red admiral, peacock, small tortoiseshell and comma. Butterflies prefer not to lay their eggs in the shade, so choose a sunny spot to grow your nettles.

Butterfly	Food plant for caterpillar
Meadow brown, hedge brown, marbled white, large skipper	Grasses including meadow grass, false brome, cocksfoot, Yorkshire fog
Large and small white	Wild/cultivated cabbages
Green veined white, orange tip	Lady's smock, hedge garlic, hedge mustard
Brimstone	Alder buckthorn, purging buckthorn
Common blue	Bird's foot trefoil
Painted lady	Thistles

Nectar giving plants for butterflies	
Spring	Primrose, aubretia, sweet rocket
Summer	Lavender, cat mint, thyme, heliotrope, red valerian, hebe, buddleia, knapweed
Autumn	Michaelmas daisy, sweet scabious, hyssop, ice-plant
	Moths like night-scented stocks, honeysuckle, evening primrose and tobacco plants

