

Gardening for Wildlife

If you have a new garden to plan or are considering making changes to an established garden, below are some ideas on how you can create your own nature reserve.

Habitats

Gardens can offer up a huge variety of different habitats for wildlife to breed and shelter and find food. It is good to create as many habitats as possible.

1. **Trees, hedges and shrubs** - offer roosting and nesting sites for birds and mammals, as well as valuable shelter and cover from the elements and possible predators. They also provide a habitat for spiders and insects.
2. **Climbers** – growing climbers against walls can provide great shelter, as well as roosting and breeding sites for birds.
3. **Borders** - filled with flowering plants and shrubs, give nectar rich food to butterflies and bees, as well as seeds, berries and cover for birds and small mammals.
4. **Lawns** - are an important habitat for all sorts of insects and minibeasts and are a good place for birds such as Blackbirds to search for ants and earthworms.
5. **Ponds** - Installing a pond is the biggest single contribution that can be made to increase the wildlife interest in a garden. A pond provides a breeding place for frogs, toads, newts, dragonflies and all the other aquatic fauna, it is also a drinking and bathing area for birds and other animals. If you do create a pond choose a site in a sunny place away from trees and include at least one sloping side to allow creatures an easy way out. A butyl liner is better than a pre-formed structure as slopes and ledges are easier to create. Allow water plants to colonise naturally. It is recommended that you don't add fish, such as goldfish or koi carp, if you want a wildlife pond as these are voracious predators of tadpoles and pond insects. However, very small fish, such as sticklebacks, can be included.
6. **Water Features** - If you do not want a pond then a water feature or bird bath or even a large dish is good. A supply of clean, unfrozen water is vital for birds all year round.
7. **Woodpiles** – Keeping a pile of logs in an undisturbed corner of the garden can provide valuable shelter for beetles and other insects and minibeasts, as well as fungi and moss.
8. **Nesting boxes** - are a great way to introduce good artificial shelters into nature.
9. **Bee houses** - A bundle of hollow stems in a quiet spot that catches the morning sun can be a home for solitary mason bees.

Food

In addition to natural food found on your trees, bushes and plants, adding an additional food sources can also add to your wildlife watching enjoyment. Different birds feed in different places and on different seed. For example, bird feeders with peanuts will attract tits and woodpeckers, feeders with Nyjer seed will attract goldfinch, and feeders with seed will attract sparrows and tits. Other birds such as yellow hammers, dunnock, robins, blackbirds are ground or bird table feeders. Fat balls feeders are popular for tits and sparrows. A section of apple is especially appreciated by blackbirds. Please remember to keep all feeders clean as the decline of the greenfinch was put down to a disease picked up on bird feeders.

Planting

Choose a range of plants that flower and seed at various times throughout the year will provide food for the animals and insects that are active and feeding over different periods.

Choose plants that are more attractive to native wildlife, for example flowers that provide pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies, moths and berry bearing plants for winter. Allow some of your plants to go to seed to provide winter food for seed-eating birds.

Avoid using herbicides, fungicides and insecticides - look for alternatives to slug pellets and use organic methods of control, such as hand weeding and mulching. Many insecticides kill beneficial species as well as harmful ones.

Below are suggestions of Trees and plants that would attract wildlife to your garden.

Trees for Wildlife (*Provide blossom and berries*)

- **Pussy Willow** (*Salix caprea*) – has lovely furry catkins in spring and supports a lot of insect life, which in turn attract birds such as warblers.
- **Silver Birch** (*Betula pendula*) – an elegant tree that supports insect life and subsequently attracts birds such as blue tits, long-tailed tits and warblers. The female catkins attract redpolls in Autumn
- **Wild Cherry** (*Prunus avium*) - has abundant blossom, followed by black berries which are a favourite of many birds.
- **Crab Apple** (*Malus*) – this is ideal for smaller gardens and will provide early fruit for insects and bullfinches. The fruit is popular with birds, butterflies and mammals such as hedgehogs
- **Rowan or Mountain Ash** (*Sorbus aucuparia*)– Produces rich crops of berries for birds in the Autumn, particularly good for blackbirds, Fieldfare and Redwing.
- **Holly** (*Ilex aquifolium*) - The berries are an important food source for many birds like Redwings, Fieldfares and Mistle thrushes.
- **Hazel** (*Corylus avellane*) - The nuts from this tree are a favourite food of Red Squirrels, Dormice and Wood Mice.

Hedges for Wildlife (*The ideal wildlife hedge is achieved by using a mixture of plants*)

- **Privet** (*Ligustrum vulgare*) – This provides good nesting cover and winter food for birds.
- **Common Hawthorn** (*Crataegus monogyna*) – this can support more than 300 insects and is the food it is the food plant for caterpillars and moths. The flowers provide nectar and pollen for bees and other pollinating insects and the haws are eaten by birds such as Redwings, Fieldfares and Thrushes.
- **Beech** (*Fagus Sylvatica*) – Good for nesting birds and for providing cover.

Shrubs for Wildlife

- **Buddleia or Butterfly bush** (*Buddleja davidii*) – This is said to be ten times more popular than any other plant with butterflies.
- **Barberry** (*Berberis*) – Excellent nesting habitat and produces fruit in mid-summer which is good for juvenile blackbirds and thrushes.
- **Californian Lilac** (*Ceanothus*) – Has beautiful blue flowers flowering in spring and providing nectar for butterflies and nesting places for birds.
- **Cotoneasters** - a valuable source of nectar when often the bees have little other forage in the June gap. The red berries are also highly attractive to blackbirds and other thrushes.
- **Box** (*Buxus sempervirens*) Common box is popular with bees and provides a dense, sheltered habitat for small birds, mammals and insects, also good as a low hedging plant.
- **Hebe** – These evergreen shrubs produce spikes of flowers in the summer and autumn and attract, bees and other winged insects.

Climbers –

- **Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera periclymenum*) – attracts bees, moths and butterflies.
- **Ivy** (*Hedera helix*) – *It provides shelter for nesting birds and hibernating insects and leaves for caterpillars. It flowers in the autumn so is a great late source of nectar for pollinators and provides winter fruit for birds.*
- **Wild Rose** (*Rosa*) – commonly known as the dog rose produces attractive scented flowers in the summer, followed by a show of bright red hips, which attract birds.
- **Passionflower** (*Passiflora*) – has exotic-looking flowers and provides general shelter for insects and birds, and nectar for some pollinators.
- **Firethorn** (*Pyracantha*) produces large amounts of berries which birds love.
- **Clematis** – provides a nesting shelter for a variety of birds and other species and the flowers provide nectar and pollen for bees. The seed heads can be left as birds will use them for nesting materials.

Borders

Including an array of colourful nectar-rich flowers in your borders will attract bees, butterflies, moths and other insects. Plant perennials with broad flower heads to encourage bees into your garden in summer. Avoid too many double flowers that can prevent insects from accessing the nectar. Leave seed heads for seed-eating birds and insects. Hollow stems and foliage can be used by for overwintering insects and spiders. Stock your beds with a range of annuals and perennials which flower over as long a season as possible, for example Crocus and Mahonia for the spring and Michaelmas daisy, Sedum and Ivy for the Autumn / Winter.

Alliums and Chives – Bees love these and they can be grown in a pot or at the front of a border. They are also useful in the kitchen. The larger version – Alliums are also a good attraction for pollinators.

English Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) – makes great hedging for pathways or along a brick wall – and is one of the best plants for attracting bees, and butterflies, as well as having a lovely fragrance.

Golden Rod (*Solidago virgaurea*) – Great for bees, butterflies and moths for nectar, and for siskins, linnets and finches for seeds.

Heather or Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) – attracts nectar-loving bees and insects.

Marigold (*Calendula*) food source for butterflies and birds will eat the seed heads.

Michaelmas Daisy (*Aster novi-belgii*) - popular with bees and butterflies for the nectar and linnets and finches for seed.

Nasturtium – these are edible plants and are a good pest controller if planted in your vegetable garden.

Nicotiana – known as the Flowering Tobacco plant is an erect growing plant with varying colours of flowers which are scented attracting bees, butterflies and moths.

Night-scented Phlox (*Zaluzianskya ovata*) good for nocturnal pollinators, such as moths

Sedums - A magnet for butterflies, but also attract bees and other types of pollinators, the seed heads can be left of for overwinter.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus*) – Attracts honeybees, bumblebees and hoverflies and butterflies for nectar and seed heads provide food for birds.

Wallflowers (*Erysimum*) – these highly scented flowers, which have strong colours are ideal for attracting butterflies, moths and insects.

In addition, you can grow native (wild) plants, these can now be purchased in garden centres, or from specialist wildflower companies or grown from seed. Note: Legislation under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) makes it illegal “to uproot any wild plant without permission from the landowner or occupier” in Britain. However take care as many spread very fast.

Native plants

- **Primroses** (*Primula vulgaris*) - early flowering plants provide nectar for emerging insects.
- **Cowslips** (*Primula veris*) – early flowering plants provide nectar for emerging insects.
- **Foxglove** (*Digitalis*) – a real favourite of bees.
- **Meadow Cranesbill** (*Geranium pratense*) – these are a favourite of bumblebees and honeybees.
- **Teasel** (*Dipsacus fullonum*) the spiky seed heads of the teasel are a favourite of goldfinch.
- **Greater Knapweed** (*Centaurea scabiosa*) Valuable nectar plants.
- **Cornflower** (*Centaurea cyanus*) – Colourful hardy annuals that attract bees and butterflies and other pollinating and beneficial insects.
- **Mountain Cornflower** (*Centaurea montana*) – Larger than above this has attractive blue / purple flowers and larger green leave.

Water plants -

You should look to plant:

Non-invasive oxygenators such as rigid hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), spiked watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and common water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*).

Pond margins need plants with upright stems or leaves are necessary for emerging dragonfly and damselfly nymphs. Yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), greater spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*), sedges (*Carex spp*), rushes (*Juncus spp*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), water plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*) are suitable.

For floating-leaved aquatics use plants such as frog-bit (*Hydrocharis morsus-rangae*) and water-lilies (*Nymphaea spp*)

Be careful not to introduce rampant non-native plants, such as Canadian pond weed (*Elodea canadensis*), floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*), parrot's feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) and New Zealand pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*, sometimes sold as *Tillaea recurva*), and rapidly-spreading floating plants such as duckweeds (*Lemna spp.*) and water ferns (*Azolla spp.*)

Regularly clean out the pond. When necessary, remove excess plant material in small quantities and leave it on the side if possible, to allow some of the pond life to escape back into the water

Useful Links

The following organisations provide useful information and guides on how to make your garden wildlife friendly.

BBC

http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics/techniques/organic_wildgardens1.shtml

Bumblebee Conservation

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/gardeningadvice/>

Butterfly Conservation

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/gardening>

Homebase

<https://www.homebase.co.uk/ideas-advice/garden-and-outdoor/garden-planning-and-designing/plan-and-design-a-garden-for-nature>

RHS

To find a plant or learn more about it go to:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/search-results?query=Myriophyllum%2Bspicatum>

Or

Learn more about wildlife gardening at: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/wildlife-garden/wildlife>

RSPB

You can request a 'Welcome Wildlife Garden' booklet at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/welcome-wildlife-to-your-garden/>

Or

Learn more about creating a wildlife garden at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/creating-a-wildlife-friendly-garden/>

Scottish Wildlife Trust

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/how-to-help/helping-wildlife-at-home/>

And Finally – Making your garden environmentally friendly

Water – Capturing and reusing rainwater offers many benefits, including saving valuable tap water, boosting the health of your gardens with chemical-free water, and avoiding watering restrictions. Collecting rain in barrels helps slow runoff and encourages rain to soak into the soil more efficiently. This is important to recharging groundwater supplies and protecting sensitive ecosystems.

Garden Furniture - choose Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified products for your outdoor furniture.

Compost

Avoid peat-based compost

Create your own compost bin - composting your garden waste helps all your garden plants and wildlife as it speeds up the natural recycling of nutrients by harnessing native decomposer organisms (saprophytes), especially fungi and soil bacteria.

Why do it at home?

- It is an excellent mulch which helps to retain moisture in the soil, suppress weeds and helps improve the soil's fertility,
- It's free and easy to produce
- Unlike organic matter imported from elsewhere, it comes without packaging or 'fuel miles'
- Compost heaps also shelter many small creatures (and some larger ones, like slug-loving slowworms and grass snakes), which enjoy the heat released by decomposition.

