Make room for wildlife...

...and feel the benefits

Wildlife-friendly gardening is about making a haven for you, as well as for wildlife.

By gardening for wildlife, you’ll be rewarded by a truly natural outdoor space, where you can enjoy the plants, animals and birds that make their home there.

The essentials of successful wildlife gardening are based on four things: trees, deadwood, water and variety of planting. Any of these features will encourage wildlife to your garden.

Handy hints for the wildlife gardener

- Resist the urge to tidy up in autumn! Seed heads left uncut will be enjoyed by birds. Plant stems and leaves are a great place for creepy crawlies to shelter. Perennials left standing will help overwintering insects such as ladybirds.
- Slugs are part of the garden’s cycle of wildlife, eaten by frogs, toads and hedgehogs. If slugs or snails are a problem avoid using slug pellets based on metaldehyde or methiocarb as this will get into the food chain. Investigate alternative methods – for example pellets based on ferrous phosphate, or products that create barriers such as copper bands or gritty sand.
- Diluted household detergent is effective against greenfly and blackfly and is thought not to harm other insects.
- Save water. Install water butts under downpipes outside your house.
- Mulch your borders in spring to keep your soil moist in hot weather. Mulch them again in autumn to help absorb heavy winter rain and prevent flooding.

Make a wildlife pond

You will need

- A plunk of wood
- A spirit level
- Butyl pond liner
- Pond plants
- A spade
- Sand
- Water
- Large rocks

Choose your spot. Draw your pond outline and dig it out, including some shallow areas. Use a plank and a spirit level to ensure that the edges are level.

Coat the hole with sand (to protect the liner from sharp stones).

Make a trench all around the edge of your pond, and lay the edge of the liner into this. Weigh it down with large rocks.

Fill the pond up with water. If you fill it from a tap or hose your water might turn green - don’t worry, this is just the minerals.

Watch and see what wildlife visits. Consider adding a plank of wood as a ramp to help any wildlife that may have fallen in.

Don’t add fish or a pump. Fish will eat the smaller life forms while the pump may suck them up.
Gardening for wildlife

Getting started
Wildlife needs four things – food, water, shelter and a place to breed. By providing these things you will bring your garden to life.

Butterfly gardens
Attract butterflies 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. 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)

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 provide food plants for caterpillars too. (See the box below for plant suggestions)

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

which have nectar-rich flowers followed by fruit. Make sure you have some evergreens too - ivy is great!

Go organic
Encourage insect and slug-eating creatures instead of using pesticides. 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.

Hedges
Hedges provide living space and food for all sorts of wildlife. Good native choices include hawthorn, blackthorn, wild rose, holly, hazel and elder. Berberis and pyracantha also produce lots of berries for the birds.

Native trees
Favour native trees. Here are some species good for wildlife.

Trees: alder, ash, aspen, beech, birch, bird cherry and wild cherry, crab apple, field maple, hazel, holly, juniper, oak, Scots pine, rowan, yew, whitebeam, willow, yew etc.

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

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.

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 creatures.

Feeding birds
Provide nuts, seeds and fat balls 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.

Meadow magic
A meadow makes a wonderful alternative to plain grass and brings vibrant colour to your lawn. It can be difficult to make a meadow from scratch but you can easily plant meadow flowers as plugs into your grass. Generally cowslip, ox-eye daisy, meadow cranesbill, yellow rattle, self-heal and meadow buttercup do well. Remember not to mow over them!

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 and let nettles grow.

Small gardens
A small space is not a barrier to gardening for wildlife; small changes can have a real impact.

• Make imaginative use of walls, roofs and other structures.
• Even the smallest of ‘ponds’ are valuable – old sinks and buckets can teem with wildlife.
• Plant a window box or container with butterfly nectar plants such as lavender or marjoram – or night-scented stocks and tobacco plants for moths.
• Make a small gravel garden planted with nectar-providing perennials such as scabious, or plant in spaces in a paved area.
With an estimated 24 million gardens in the UK, the way they are managed can make a big difference for wildlife. Hedgehogs, sparrows, song thrushes and stag beetles are all declining species in the UK. If we manage our gardens for wildlife, these creatures and many more will feel the benefits. So give it a go and watch as wildlife brings colour, movement and beauty to your garden.

Visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/gardening for more ideas.

Join The Wildlife Trusts

You can make a real difference to our work to protect wildlife by becoming a member of your local Wildlife Trust.

Your money will help look after the wildlife and wild places in your area, and support your Trust in their work to inspire people about nature, including working with local schools and communities.

To find out more about membership please visit: www.wildlifetrusts.org or call us on 01636 677711.

Reg charity no 207238 © The Wildlife Trusts 2018