

Garden Watch: A weekend of Wildlife

Ideas to make your garden a wildlife haven

Spring is the perfect time to get out in the garden and create your very own wildlife haven! Gardens are vitally important for wildlife and they can provide 'green corridors' or 'stepping stones' to connect to the wider countryside and richer wildlife areas.

Create your very own 'Living Landscape'

The Wildlife Trusts across the country are working to create 'Living Landscapes'. We are working to make our own nature reserves bigger, better and more joined-up. We are working to create landscapes where wildlife can move freely between sites and expand in range and numbers; where people can explore nature locally and where habitats are connected.

We have started by connecting our nature reserves through purchasing and restoring land in between and also by working with local land owners to help them to provide high-quality wildlife habitats on their land and to link in to Wildlife Trust nature reserves. However, in urban areas, gardens are the best habitat available to wildlife and hold the main potential for connecting larger green areas. Collectively across the UK we look after more than two million acres of gardens – that's an area five times the size of Greater London!

With the countryside increasingly under threat, many species are looking for refuge in our gardens. You don't need a huge garden to make a difference – even some flowers on a balcony or a small log pile will be appreciated by the smaller creatures.

By making a few simple changes to the way you look after your garden you can share your garden with a host of feathered and furred friends, as well as insects and amphibians.

Look after our feathered friends

Bird boxes can provide great entertainment for bird lovers, especially in the spring when the nesting season starts. Buy a ready made one (you can buy ones designed for different species) or get crafty and make your own. A bird table or feeding station will be a welcome addition to the garden. Put out any kitchen food scraps including currants, cheese, baked potato and moistened bread. To increase the number of birds visiting your garden make sure you spread the food around - leave some on the ground, hang fat balls from trees and put scraps on a bird table. If you have fruit trees growing, why not leave some of the windfalls for the birds to tidy up.



Make a compost heap

A compost heap is one easy way you can start a wildlife friendly garden almost instantly. Leaving an area of the garden unkempt and using it for the upcoming summer grass cuttings will give a home, food and a breeding ground to worms, woodlice, millipedes, grass snakes and even hedgehogs. Vegetable peelings, tea bags, cardboard, hay and even coffee grounds can all be added to a compost heap. It can provide free fertiliser and it's a great way to reduce the waste going to landfill.

What about a pond?

Not all gardens can comfortably accommodate a pond but if you can - providing an area of water is one of the best things you can do to introduce a whole new variety of fascinating creatures to your garden. Frogs and newts are known to quickly take up home in new ponds and beetles, dragonflies and water boatmen won't be far behind. As well as being somewhere for creatures to live, ponds can be a source of drinking water for mammals and birds. By keeping the grass long around the edge you can help creatures to hide from predators.



Create a dead wood pile

Dead wood can provide a home for lots of different insects including beetles, woodlice and centipedes, as well as many types of lichens, fungi and mosses. Leave

a pile of wood in the corner of your garden and it will soon be bustling with life. By attracting invertebrates in to your garden you will also attract those animals that eat them such as frogs, toads and hedgehogs.



Why not create a hedgehog hotel?

Provide a home for hedgehogs by making an entrance hole in a cardboard box and placing some dry leaves or hay inside. This can help when it comes to hibernation later in the year. Cat or dog food, not milk, is a good way to lure the prickly creatures to your garden.

Add some colour by gardening for insects

Butterflies are vulnerable to changing climates and habitats so it's really important we look after them when we garden. A variety of plants in both sunny and shady spots will encourage more fluttering visitors and they tend to be liked by bees and other insects too. Hebe is not only a pretty shrub but its flowers attract butterflies and bees to feed. Lavender is also a great fragrant plant that adds colour and scent to your garden as well as attracting wildlife. Growing night scented flowers such as

honeysuckle and evening primrose will help to attract moths and having an area of nettles is a good food source for caterpillars of small tortoiseshell butterflies.



Don't forget to feed yourself

Growing your own vegetables or fruits is really satisfying and great fun. This doesn't need to take up a large area – potatoes can be grown in tubs and blackberries up a spiral frame. You can even plant smaller vegetables and salad leaves in amongst your flowers to provide variation in colour.