

Top Tips for Wildlife Gardening



Did you know that your garden is teeming with wildlife? Often hidden from view, even the tiniest creatures are vital to the functioning of your garden.

Birds and butterflies add colour, grace and movement; bees, beetles and bugs pollinate flowers, recycle nutrients and feed larger creatures. Follow our top tips to share your garden with wildlife and see what you can discover.

And remember, the more wildlife you encourage and support the more interest and enjoyment you'll have.

Brighten your garden with flowers: Flowers provide pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and other insects all year round. Many garden plants are as good for wildlife as wild flowers are. These include aubrieta and flowering currant in spring; buddleia, lavender and thyme in summer; and sedum, Michaelmas daisy and hebe in autumn.

Have a variety of trees, shrubs and climbers or a mixed hedge: These give food and shelter to wildlife. Good small trees for blossom and berries include rowan, crab apple and hawthorn. Ivy provides shelter for nesting birds, plus autumn flowers for nectar, and winter berries for birds and small mammals; moths love honeysuckle. Don't cut hedges in the nesting season.

Look after mature trees: Because these trees will look after the wildlife. Old trees are more important for wildlife than any other single factor. If your garden's too small for big trees, try to get some planted in the neighbourhood and protect any that are there already.

Create a pond: Create a pond or just use an upturned bin lid or a sunken washing bowl filled with water. Make sure it has one sloping side to allow creatures an easy way out, and add lots of plants.

Leave a pile of dead wood in a shady spot: Any wood will do, although big logs are best and can make a home for anything from beetles to other useful mini-beasts.

Build a compost heap: It will save you money as well as helping garden plants and wildlife. Compost makes for healthy soil, which is good for everything living in it and growing on it. Compost heaps also shelter many useful creatures, like slow worms that eat slugs.

Provide food and water for birds all year round: Providing a mix of food such as peanuts, seeds, kitchen scraps and fat balls, plus natural food such as berries and seed-heads, will attract a wide range of birds.

Relax!: Don't feel that you have to be too tidy. Leave some areas undisturbed, especially between March and May. Piles of leaves and twiggy debris in a hedge bottom, or out-of-the-way corner, will shelter frogs, mice and hedgehogs, and the seeds in dead flower heads can be valuable food. Let a patch of grass grow longer, as this encourages wild flowers, provides shelter for small mammals and food for some butterfly caterpillars.

Garden in a sustainable way: This helps to protect wildlife and the environment worldwide. Use fewer chemicals and no peat, choose wood from sustainable sources, recycle all you can and save water. Check the origin of any wood you buy for the garden. Wood products (including paper) with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) label are from well-managed forests and will not contribute to the destruction of tropical rain forests.

Get active outdoors. Being active outdoors improves your health and helps you to feel more energetic and less stressed. Every minute you spend in the garden is good for you both mentally and physically.

Sourced from www.naturalengland.org.uk