

Warwickshire

Wildlife Trust



WILDLIFE GARDEN
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Planning your Wildlife Garden

Wildlife gardening is an excellent way of supporting our declining population of wildlife by providing them with the perfect home. Developing your school grounds with wildlife in mind, not only benefits a diverse range of plants and creatures, but also people!

It can be increasingly difficult to get children interested in wildlife when green space has become so limited, especially in built up areas. Creating a wildlife garden in your school grounds will provide children with the opportunity to experience a fascinating variety of creatures and habitats up close. Educational activities can be planned around the garden, offering an exciting and inspiring way for children to learn about the environment.

The first step to growing and maintaining a great garden is the planning. Get the whole school involved, it is an excellent opportunity for children to work together on a rewarding project.

Collect Opinions and Suggestions

- Talk to members of the school about what they would and would not like. Consider a questionnaire.
- Seek support and volunteers from the local community with posters, leaflets, letters to parents and get in contact with your local newspapers.

Consider the Constraints

- Think about what is already there, the cost and potential health and safety issues.
- You will need to choose a location which receives at least five to seven hours of sunlight each day as plants like a lot of sunlight to grow. Decide a location that works best for your grounds and compliments existing structures. Remember: gardens come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, so be as creative as you like!
- How long will it take? Put together a timescale for completion and a five year management plan. Think about what time of year you will have to start work and carry out maintenance. Consider creating a committee to manage the maintenance of the garden.
- Work to clear objectives. Decide exactly what you want to get out of your garden.

Designing your Garden

- This is an excellent opportunity to get the kids involved. Creating a 3-dimensional plan or drawing of the garden with measurements will help visualize the possibilities.
- Explain to the children that wildlife needs four important things to live in the garden; food, water, shelter and a place to breed. They will need to remember this when designing the garden.
- Next you will need to think about which plants you would like to include in your garden. When choosing your plants pay attention to the type of climate, amount of sunshine, space requirements for the plant and what creatures you would like to attract.
- Ideas for what to include in your garden:

Butterfly garden
Wildlife pond
Bird garden
Herb garden
Meadow
Hedges
Rockery
Bird table

Tree nursery
Log piles
Raised beds
Checker board
planting area
Shelterbelts
Seating areas
Living Willow Dome

Woodland edge
Bog garden
Natural Dye garden
Scented garden
Sensory garden
Vegetable garden
Window boxes
Compost area

- Visit local gardens, read books and magazines.
- Do not be tempted to dig up wildflowers, it is illegal and they are unlikely to survive!
- Create a detailed, accurate drawing of the final garden plan and consult as many people as possible to make sure it's achievable.
- Start small, expanding and developing your wildlife garden over time.

Get Permission and/or Funding

- Seek approval from your local authority. You might want to apply for grants and fundraising.

Get to Work!

- Involve pupils as much as possible and get digging!

Using your Garden

- Create lesson plans relating to the garden.

Review your Success

- Review if the garden has been a success.

Planting your Wildlife Garden

After all the planning, it is finally time to get started! Clear the area and mark off the overall shape and sections of the garden. You could use twigs, string or stones. Now you can start digging!

Preparing the Soil

- When digging you will need to dig at least ten inches deep, breaking up any clumps of soil and removing grass, weeds, rocks and debris as you go. Add a few inches of organic compost on top and your soil is now prepared for planting.

When to Plant

- The ideal time of year for planting, depends on what you want to grow. Read the labels of plants and seeds for instructions. If in doubt, ask for advice in your local gardening centre.

Flowers

- Planting native wild flowers is a great idea to support the local wildlife, but can sometimes take a while to get established. Plant some normal garden variety nectar-rich flowers, the more nectar/pollen producing plants you have the better your garden will be for butterflies, bees and a variety of other insects.
- Choose plants that flower at different times of year to ensure that pollen and nectar are available over a long period.

Grasses

- Letting grass grow long in a certain area is an easy way to support wildlife in your garden. Long grass is an excellent habitat for grasshoppers, beetles and young amphibians, and provides roosts for insects such as damselflies. Grasses are also important food sources for the caterpillars of some butterflies.

Flowers and plants you may consider planting:

**Rowan
Alder
Hedges
Borage
Clover
Mint**

**Lavender
Foxglove
Cowslip
Daffodils
Bluebells
Ivy**

**Honeysuckle
Thistles
Nettles
Brambles**

Vegetable Patch

A vegetable garden is another great learning resource for your school, as well as attracting wildlife. Growing vegetables from organic seeds is easy!

- Rake the soil and sprinkle with organic fertilizer. Sew the seeds according to the seed's instructions, water regularly and watch them grow!

Vegetables and fruit you may consider growing:

**Beetroot
Carrots
Potatoes
Onions**

**Pumpkins
Tomatoes
Cabbage
Brussels sprouts**

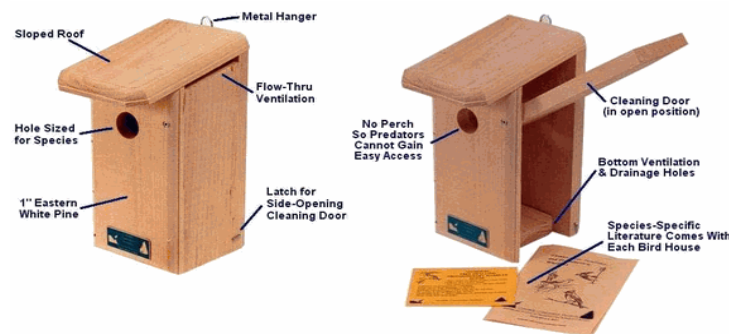
**Aubergine
Chilli peppers
Strawberries**

Animal Homes

Birds

Boxes should be sited out of the way of cats or people at about 5m high. They require shade so should be situated facing between north and east directions avoiding strong sunlight and wet winds. The box should be tilted forward a little so that driving rain doesn't enter through the hole.

Placing boxes under the eaves of your house will attract House sparrows and starlings and it will also often deter the birds from nesting in your roof. Keep these away from areas where House martins or swifts normally nest. Robins and wrens are more likely to use open fronted boxes that are surrounded by vegetation. Open-fronted boxes for robins and wrens need to be low down and well hidden in vegetation.

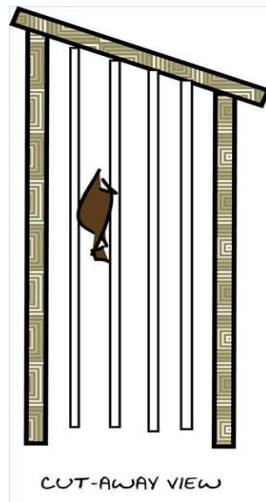


Bats

Once you have bought or made your box the best place to site them is where you see bats regularly, out of the way of strong wind but positioned where they can get sun for part of the day. As bats use roosts in winter for hibernating and in the summer as maternity roosts (where females gather to give birth to their young) your box may only get used at certain times of the year depending on its position. If it is in a less sunny, cool position then it is more likely it will be used as a winter hibernating roost and in a sunnier, warmer position to be used as a maternity roost.

Essentially bat boxes should be located close to a linear vegetation feature such as a tree line or hedgerow as some bats use these for navigation and for avoiding detection by flying around in open areas. Ensure that there are no branches or obstacles in the way of the entrance to the box so providing a clear flight path.

Ensure your bat box is high enough to avoid disturbance by cats or vandals but not so high that you risk your own personal safety. Under the eaves of houses or around 5m on trees is the suggested height. You can place them on other structures such as poles, gazebos, garden walls and sheds but always ensure that they are high enough to avoid predators.



Bees

Choose a sheltered, south-facing spot to site bumblebee boxes. It should be warm but out of direct sunlight.

Place bumblebee boxes near a fence, under a hedge or in a flower bed — almost anywhere bumblebees might forage for food. Mice sometimes nest in bumblebee boxes. This can be good for bees the following year, as they may use any nesting material left behind.

Attach a mason bee box to a tree or post as this species tends to nest higher off the ground than bumblebees. The box can be put in direct sunlight. Point the entrance down slightly so that the bees don't get wet.



Toads

The thing to remember is to ensure that toads always have access to moisture. This is especially important in the summer months where a toad will smell out the nearest moist patch and will burrow down into the cool, moist earth in order to protect its body. Therefore, placing logs, rocks and plants around your pond and garden under which toads can seek out moisture and refuge from the sun, will create an ideal environment to attract toads.

You could also create your own 'toad home' when gardening by digging a hole in the earth in a shaded area of your garden, ideally close to the shade from trees and then place a plastic plant pot over the top of it. Into that, you could periodically put in some well-rotted leaves which you've left soaking in water and then put a small rock over the top to keep the pot in place. This would make an ideal refuge for toads. The pot should have a hole in the top so that, in extremely hot weather, you can pour in some cold water now and again to keep the ground below moist. You can also buy actual toad houses instead of using a plant pot. Letting part of your garden grow a little wild which will create piles of leaves and other foliage will also offer sanctuary to toads. However, it is also important to remember to be very careful when gardening if you're mowing the garden and to ensure that you do not mow those areas beneath which a toad may be resting.



Worms

Wormeries are enclosed bins which use special types of worm to help break down organic matter. They are available for sale but you can also make your own.

Suitable Materials for your Wormery

- Recycled wood from old pallets (check that they are free from wood preservatives as they harm the worms).
- An old plastic standard sized bin

Building your Wormery

1. Drill drainage holes around the base and air hole at the top of a plastic dustbin, approx 5cm from the base, 25cm apart.
2. Fill bin with 8-10cm layer of coarse sand or gravel.
3. On top of this place a circle of wood or polythene with holes drilled for drainage.
4. Add a 7-8cm layer of moistened bedding material, such as well rotted compost manure or leaf mould.
5. Place at least 100 worms in the bedding.
6. Add a litre of chopped food to one side of the bin and cover this with a well soaked whole newspaper.
7. Replace the lid and leave undisturbed for at least two weeks for the worms to settle.

Maintaining your wormery

- Worms will eat almost anything that will decompose.
- They should be fed primarily on kitchen scraps but they will process weeds and other garden waste.
- Large quantities of citrus peel, seeds and diseased material and meat and fish are best avoided.
- Worms can be killed by overfeeding - don't add more waste until the previous addition has been composted.
- Keep container covered to avoid fruit flies.
- Don't allow the bin to get too hot or dry out.
- If the heap begins to smell (too wet), pull everything out, mix it well with brown material and return to the bin.
- If the heap remains unchanged (too dry) pull everything out, water it, mix it with green material and return to the bin.
- Ready compost may be stored in medium-sized sacks (30 or 40 litres) in a cool, dry place.

Maintaining your Wildlife Garden

When creating a wildlife garden, it is important that you maintain your garden with a sustainable, environmentally friendly approach.

Weeding

- Do not be too tidy! For example; piles of twigs and leaves provide shelter for creatures and the seeds in a dead flower head will provide food for birds.
- When it comes to weeding it's important to understand that plants we might consider a nuisance could be food or a home to certain creatures. But, because weeds spread so quickly, it will still be important to manage them so they do not swamp the whole garden.
- When weeds are beginning to take over, dig them up from the roots and dispose of them in your organic wheelie bin (do not put them in to compost where they are likely to continue spreading).

Composting

- Recycle your organic kitchen and garden waste to create compost for the garden. The compost heap will not only provide you with an excellent soil conditioner but will also be home to insects and other animals and is a rich feeding ground for birds and beetles.

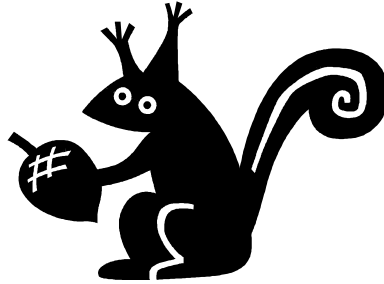
Avoid Chemicals

- Chemicals can be damaging to the environment so by avoiding pesticides you will increase the number of insects living in your garden and this in turn will attract birds and other predators which will do the job for you!
- Planting French or African Marigolds amongst your veggie patch can help deter pests.
- Rotating your crop every season can also help to keep your vegetables in healthy condition.
- Do not use peat to enrich your soil as the demand for peat is destroying valuable habitats.

Do Not Waste Water!

- Collecting rain water with a water butt is a good sustainable way to water your garden.

Further Information



If you would like further advice or information or are interested in other educational services we can provide please contact us:

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