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# Hedgehog-Friendly Gardening Pack

Your guide to making your garden hedgehog-friendly

Britain's hedgehogs have declined by a third since the Millennium. Hedgehogs like to live alongside us in our gardens, and making your green space hedgehog-friendly is an excellent way of helping to conserve our iconic prickly species. Called an 'umbrella species', what is good for hedgehogs is often good for a wide range of other wildlife, so you will be doing more than just helping hedgehogs. This guide shows you how to plan, plant and maintain a hedgehog-friendly garden.



British Hedgehog  
Preservation Society

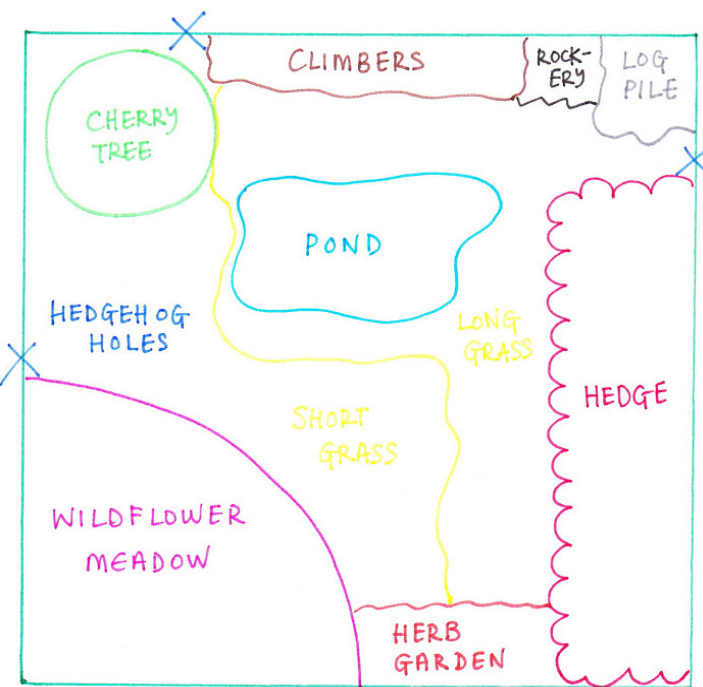


# Planning

1. *Considerations:* Whether you are working from scratch or adapting a pre-existing garden, planning is the first step. You will need to work around what you already have and consider both short and long term constraints. These might be 'human' e.g. how much time, effort and money you have available, or 'physical' e.g. size of plot, how much sunlight it receives, whether it is exposed or sheltered, its soil type.

**Top tip:** Sand, silt, and clay soils can be any pH and generally suit grassland and woodland habitats. Chalk soils are alkaline and suit rocky, coastline and chalk grassland habitats. Peat soils are acidic and suit acid heath and marshland habitats. Think about your soil type and what habitats and plants are likely to thrive. It is always easier to work with what you have than try and change the basics!

Even small spaces can become a mini wildlife haven! They can be made more visually appealing and encourage more wildlife when 3D – grow up and down by planting trees and climbers, or make a green roof on a shed or outbuilding. Choose plants that are interesting throughout the year such as evergreen climbers e.g. ivy, plants with long-lasting seed heads e.g. honesty, teasel, and shrubs with an extended flowering and fruiting season e.g. hawthorn. Make it multi-sensual e.g. water features can add sounds, and different flowers can provide varied scents across the year.



2. *Draw a plan of your new garden:* Include different habitat types, remembering that wildlife needs four important things to thrive: food, water, shelter and a place to breed. Think about how large plants are likely to grow in the future and add features to make your garden diverse. Now you have researched your plot, you're ready to begin!

# Planting

1. *Clear the area:* If digging up concrete, you may need tools such as a demolition hammer to help you! Be careful when clearing and keep some existing plants until your new planting is established, as it will provide a temporary refuge for wildlife. Then mark out habitat sections using twigs, string and stones.

**Top tip:** If you are cutting down any plants or branches with hollow stems, cut and bundle them together to encourage insects e.g. ladybirds that may overwinter in them.

2. *Prepare the soil:* Dig at least 10 inches deep, breaking up clumps of soil and removing rocks and debris. Remove grass and weeds from the root. Perhaps add top soil if you are going to put down turf or grass seed, or organic compost if you are planting. Do not use compost in areas that you plan to make into a wildflower meadow. Meadows need to be low in nutrients, allowing the wildflowers to grow and not be outcompeted by the more tenacious grasses.



**Grasses:** Having a 'wild' area where the grass grows long provides a good habitat for a range of wildlife including grasshoppers, beetles, leatherjackets, damselflies and amphibians. It is even better when positioned next to a hedge, giving a gradient of different habitats. Hedgehogs may use grass in their nests, sometimes even making a day nest amongst long grass. They will also feed on caterpillars that use the grass as a food source. Wild flowers to plant in long grass left uncut for most of summer are scabious, mallow, wild marjoram and teasel. Mown lawns can provide easy access to worms for hedgehogs and can be made species rich.

**Plants:** Plant a range of trees, shrubs and flowering, depending on your chosen habitats e.g. meadow, woodland edge. Consider the time of year you need to plant different plants and check the label if unsure. Choose plants that flower at different times of year to ensure that pollen and nectar are available over a long period e.g. primrose and aubretia flower for the spring, knapweed and thyme for the summer, and yarrow for the autumn. Plant native cultivated stock that support a greater diversity of our native wildlife and avoid garden varieties with double flowers that do not provide nectar. See [rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators](https://www.rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators) for plants that encourage pollinators.

**Trees:** Trees provide habitat for invertebrates e.g. beetles and caterpillars, that hedgehogs eat and the leaves provide nesting material. Not every garden has room for something as species rich as an oak tree, but others e.g. cherry, are smaller but still attract insects as well as dropping fruit, and some dwarfing or columnar varieties of native trees are available.



**Top tip:** Think 'green' when buying materials. Use biodegradable pots made from clay, solar powered lighting, FSC certified wood and local produce. Reuse and recycle non-biodegradable materials e.g. plastics. Use peat free compost as our harvesting of peat is destroying valuable habitat and becoming unsustainable!

**Top tip:** Don't be afraid to be messy! Long-lasting hibernation nests for hedgehogs are often found amongst nettles and brambles. They make a large layered pile of leaves and move about inside to make a snug for themselves. Bramble keeps the leaves in place and holds the structure, whilst protecting against other elements e.g. wind. A good bank of bramble can support lots of hedgehogs during the winter, not to mention providing some tasty autumn fruit!

Now you can think about creating features, such as a rockery, beetle bank, bog garden or herb garden...



# Adding features

**Leaf pile:** Hedgehogs use leaves to make their nests so do not clear them away! They particularly like to use medium-sized leaves e.g. oak, lime and cherry. Leaves also act as a useful insulating 'mulch' as they breakdown and leaf litter provides a home for invertebrates e.g. ground beetles.

**Log pile and compost heap:** Hedgehogs may hibernate and shelter in these and they attract invertebrates for hedgehogs to eat. Compost heaps also provide a place for you to dispose of organic kitchen and garden waste and in turn provide you with future mulch and soil conditioner.

**Top tip:** Put weeds in the green wheelie bin rather than in your compost heap, where they may spread.



**Hedge:** Hedgehogs use hedges for food, shelter and as connecting corridors. Hedges are great for a range of other wildlife too, including birds and small mammals. They are less costly to maintain than fences, look more attractive, filter wind more effectively, and can be a deterrent to burglars if prickly! Plant your hedge in autumn using a range of native species e.g. hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, wild privet and guelder rose.

**Pond:** Ponds bring life to your garden instantly and provide a great water source for animals like hedgehogs in hot spells. Ponds should be sited in a sunny spot away from trees and are best created with a flexible liner to create sloping sides and ledges. This allows easy access for hedgehogs and amphibians as well as supporting a range of plant species. Plant non-invasive oxygenators e.g. spiky water-milfoil, inside the pond and lesser spearwort, water plantain, water forget-me-not and sedges around the edges to create areas of shelter for wildlife.

**Top tip:** Collect rain water in a water butt. This provides a sustainable way of watering your garden and can also be used to fill and top up your pond. This can prevent an initial algae bloom that can occur when filling with tap water.

**Meadow:** A wild flower meadow can look spectacular in summer and support a range of invertebrates for hedgehogs to eat. They can take a while to establish and using 'plug plants' rather than growing from seed can be more successful. Yellow rattle can help wild flowers to flourish by semi-parasitising and keeping tenacious grasses under control. For an instant but more costly result, consider purchasing native species wildflower turf. You can even buy wildflower turf that contains 'short' species e.g. clover, birdsfoot trefoil, self heal, that are still good for wildlife but can be mown on a regular basis for areas where you want shorter grass.

**Hedgehog hole:** Cut a 13x13cm hole in the base of your fence and gate, or alternatively dig underneath. Talk to your neighbours and encourage them to do the same. Hedgehogs need to travel far and wide to find food and mates (sometimes up to 3km a night!) so do your bit to create a network of 'hedgehog highways' and allow them access. You can make a feature of it by designing or buying an arch or sign and can make a tunnel leading into it that deters cats and other larger animals.



**Top tip:** It's not just hedgehogs that are the 'gardener's friend', don't forget to add habitats for other wildlife. Frogs, toads, birds and beetles prey on slugs and snails. Ladybirds, lacewings, hoverflies and spiders eat aphids (greenfly and blackfly) as well as red spider mites. Centipedes love vine weevils, woodlice and snails too. Bees, butterflies and moths not only pollinate our plants but provide food to birds and bats.

# Making it safe

**Compost heap:** Be careful when turning your compost in case hedgehogs and other wildlife e.g. amphibians, are sheltering or looking for food inside. Check before using the fork!

**Strimmers/mowers:** Check long grass and scrubby areas before you cut as hedgehogs and other wildlife e.g. toads, may be sheltering at the bottom.

**Drains and holes:** Cover up holes and maintain drain covers as hedgehogs can become trapped if they fall in.

**Litter:** Hedgehogs can get stuck in litter such as cans and binders from drinks and yoghurt pots. Dispose of litter safely and keep it contained.

**Netting:** Tie up any slack sports or fruit netting and ideally raise it above the ground as hedgehogs can become entangled.

**Ponds:** Use bricks, rocks, or wood to create a ramp out of your pond. Although good swimmers, hedgehogs are prone to falling into ponds and being unable to find a way out.



*Go organic!* Don't use slug pellets, weedkillers and pesticides. Most 'pests' are an important part of the ecosystem, providing food for wildlife e.g. birds, toads and hedgehogs, and killing these pests removes a food source. The chemicals can also accumulate, sometimes killing predators higher up the food chain. Many chemicals are indiscriminate, killing useful creatures as well as pests. Often pests are more resilient, recovering quicker than their predators. Consider natural methods of control.



**Water plants in the morning** so it is less wet at night for slugs and snails.

**Create barriers to slugs and snails**, such as using gritty sand and copper tape around plants (particularly in pots). Copper is thought to repel slugs by reacting with their slime to give a mild electric shock. Watering in wool pellets around the base of plants can be an effective deterrent with small fibres irritating the slug and drawing out moisture. 'Beer traps' placed into the soil are often effective too but can accidentally also kill their predators e.g. ground beetles.

**Diluted household detergent** is useful against greenfly and blackfly. Acid from boiled **rhubarb leaves** mixed with soap flakes and warm water can control aphids, as can liquid made from young **nettles** soaked in water.

**Rotate edible garden crops** every season to keep them healthy.

Although there is little scientific evidence for it, gardeners often use **companion planting** to deter pests e.g. planting marigolds amongst vegetables. Even if this is not the case, it can be a space saver for small gardens e.g. planting sweetcorn and courgettes together maximises space with the sweetcorn growing up tall and the courgettes growing low and filling the gaps.

**Chilli** is thought to deter birds and ants from eating seed, and **pepper dust** to deter cats, rabbits and mice.

**Tree guards and metal mesh** can protect young saplings from deer, rabbits and squirrels. Planting shrubs and flowers that are unpalatable to rabbits and deer works well too e.g. elder, rosemary, sage and honesty.



**Top tip:** Features e.g. log piles, encourage natural pest predators e.g. ground beetles and spiders, which will eat slugs and insects, and in turn be eaten by hedgehogs.



# Maintenance

**Climbers:** Train on trellises at least 10cm away from the fence or wall to allow space for birds and bats to shelter behind. Prune by making downward slanted cuts just above the buds to encourage new growth and prevent the plant from taking over.

**Hedges:** Once established, cut your hedge every 3 years or one side each year, and lay it when it is older. Hedges should be wider at the base than the top to allow light to penetrate. Only trim between November and March out of breeding bird season and leave nooks and crannies for birds to nest in.

**Meadows and long grass:** Strim once a year between mid July and September after the plants have gone to seed, usually. Rake off cut vegetation to keep the nutrients low.

**Ponds:** Keep water clean and low in nutrients by preventing 'run off' from nearby bare soil and use poor planting mediums for pond plants e.g. sandy rather than rich compost. If vegetation starts to take over, thin it at the end of the summer. Leave thinned material by the pond overnight to allow any creatures within to escape.

**Weeds:** These can provide food and shelter to wildlife. Remove dead flower heads late in the season and manage the spread rather than clearing them completely, as they are a useful food source for birds. Leaving some perennials until the spring will provide shelter for overwintering insects such as ladybirds that in turn will eat your aphids next year! Thistles and nettles provide food for butterfly caterpillars e.g. painted lady, red admiral, and peacock, which are then a potential food source for hedgehogs. Cutting some nettles before they set seed can also really boost your compost.

**Mulching:** Putting a layer of organic matter on top of soil e.g. bark chippings in the spring and autumn, can help to absorb and retain moisture. It can also stunt weed growth and help protect bulbs against harsh frosts.



*Front gardens:* Don't forget these are just as valuable as back gardens, and can be made both wildlife-friendly and 'neat'. Climbers can be trained to look attractive and do not take up lots of space. Honeysuckle is good for hedgehogs because it retains its structure during winter, making it a useful nesting site, especially if grown over a log pile. Evergreen hedges e.g. holly, native privet, can be trimmed neatly and add privacy. Even paths and driveways can be useful if you plant some low-growing rockland plants in the gaps that are resistant when driven or walked over. Thyme grows well in gaps and is good for hedgehogs because it is a food plant to several moth caterpillar species that they eat.

**Top tip:** Make sure you have a gap under your gate to allow hedgehogs access to your back garden.

*Want to find out if hedgehogs are visiting your garden?* Download our "How To... Footprint Survey" leaflet and find out!

