

Gardening for Wildlife



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01 Wildlife gardening is for everyone



You do not need any particular level of expertise to start a wildlife garden. There are only a few rights and wrongs that you will learn as you go along. You do not need much space and even a window-box or a few pots is enough.

A wildlife garden does not have to be a wilderness. It can meet your aspirations as well as the needs of wildlife. Urban gardens are just as suitable as gardens in the countryside. In fact, they can be even more important as a wildlife haven.

“No one will protect what they don’t care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced”

Sir David Attenborough, TCV Vice President

The benefits of managing your garden for wildlife are immeasurable. You’ll have the excitement of discovering the creatures that have made the garden their home. You and your children will learn about the animals as you watch them. You’ll have the satisfaction of knowing that you are making a vital contribution to the conservation of your local environment. And your garden will simply become more interesting...



Common frog (*Rana temporaria*)



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So what is wildlife gardening?



We can all name different types of wildlife: birds, insects, hedgehogs, frogs, foxes, badgers, bats, and mice are just some.

Wildlife gardening is about encouraging these animals and others into your garden. Whilst you are unlikely to see all of these, every garden can accommodate some.

You probably already know more about wildlife gardening than you think.

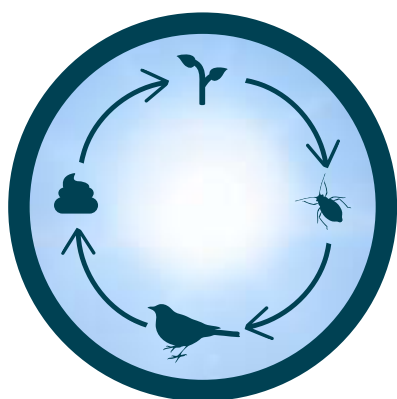
“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better”

Albert Einstein

You can probably suggest items that might be found in a wildlife garden: your list may include a bird table, a pond, trees, flowers, a bird box or a bat box.

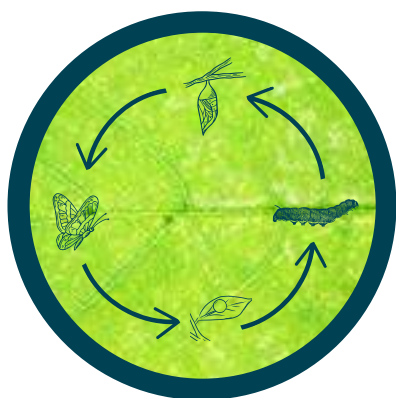
To get a deeper knowledge of wildlife gardening, there are some concepts which may help you to understand what is actually going on outside your door.





1 Food chains

Aphids eat plants. Those aphids are eaten by insects which are eaten by birds. So to encourage birds into your garden, we need to make sure that the appropriate plants are present to provide the food source for the first link in the chain.



2 Life cycles

Many wildlife species go through different stages in their life cycle. For example, a butterfly starts life as an egg, hatches into a caterpillar, forms a chrysalis, and pupates into a butterfly. They have different requirements at each stage and thus at different times of year.



3 Year round food and shelter

Don't forget to try to provide a continuous supply of food and shelter. Apart from helping the wildlife that has come to expect a constant welcome in your garden, you will also be ensuring that you have a continuous display to enjoy!



4 Service stations

Many species can travel relatively large distances, but often need 'stopping off' points en route to rest and feed. You could find that species, such as birds and butterflies, take a break in your garden while travelling between feeding, nesting or roosting points. This provides a vital link in the chain that allows species to migrate to places farther away. Thus, you may be helping species to colonise a much wider area, even though your garden in itself may not offer everything that is needed.

04 'Pests'



All species are important parts of the ecosystem, even if they are what we would describe as 'pests'.

They provide food for animals and other insects further up the food chain. They may even turn into 'friendly' wildlife later on in their lives (remember that those caterpillars which eat the cabbages turn into butterflies later on).

In addition, putting down pesticides may have adverse effects on other wildlife which accidentally get poisoned, either by eating the pesticide or by eating the poisoned 'pest'. Try either organic methods of pest control, or plant more food plants than you need, and share them with wildlife.

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

William Shakespeare

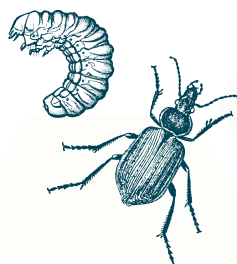
Deadwood habitats

Just because it isn't alive doesn't mean that it isn't important. Deadwood is dead good.

Fallen trees or branches stacked in a pile provide a living space for many different kinds of insects which live in the wood or use it as shelter. Small mammals and amphibians may also use it as shelter. Fungi, lichen, moss and bacteria can also grow there.



A dead tree can provide food and shelter for many, many years.



Take a look here for our [video on how to make a hedgehog home](#)

05 Wildlife needs

Different wildlife species have different needs and, if you are to help them survive, you will need to meet some of these needs.

It may not be necessary for you to meet all of the needs, however. A bird, for example, may perch and feed in your garden, but may nest elsewhere.

Butterflies

Butterflies are more dependent on native species than birds, and caterpillars will often feed on only a specific species of plant.

Wildflower areas with a range of native species can be rich in wildlife as well as attractive. However, the butterflies themselves will often be less fussy and feed on nectar from both native and exotic (non-native) flowers.



Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)

Shrubs to try include Buddleja (the 'butterfly bush'), Forsythia, and Honeysuckle. As butterflies are cold-blooded and need to warm themselves in the sunshine, climbers on south-facing walls may be used as basking spots.



“It would be absolutely useless for any of us to work to save wildlife without working to educate the next generation of conservationists.”

Jane Goodall



06 Birds

Birds need a plentiful supply of food. In winter, natural food resources can usefully be topped up with seeds or other food. In spring, plenty of food is needed for the new broods of young birds.

Other food sources include insects (from deadwood habitats or pond surfaces), berries (try planting Berberis, Ivy or Cotoneaster), worms (from lawns) and seeds (try teasel).

Birds also need roosting and perching places, so tree branches or telegraph poles are used, or ivy provides them with shelter from the elements. In spring, birds need nesting places, which may be artificial (bird boxes) or natural (in trees or ivy bushes). Try to keep perching and nesting places away from cats.

Materials for building nests are also needed at this time of year, so leave the moss that you raked out of your lawn in a pile in a corner to help keep the chicks warm and cosy.

Water is another essential. Place bird baths out of the reach of cats, or make sure that there is a shallow bank at the edge of your pond.



Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) on a Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*)



Tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

07 Garden suggestions

There are plenty of simple ways in which you can improve your garden's wildlife potential. The ideas below may start you off, but do try other things as well. Not all of these ideas will suit every garden: choose those that fit both what is possible in your garden, and what you would like to see in your garden.

Lawns

Lawns are an important part of a wildlife garden, but if you have a large lawn area, you could try creating different areas within it. Blackbirds like to forage for worms on short grass, so leave some of this, but also let some grow longer to provide cover for small animals.



Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

You could plant some of your lawn up as a wildflower meadow: you will enjoy seeing the different flowers come through, as well as the butterflies and other insects which need them.

Compost

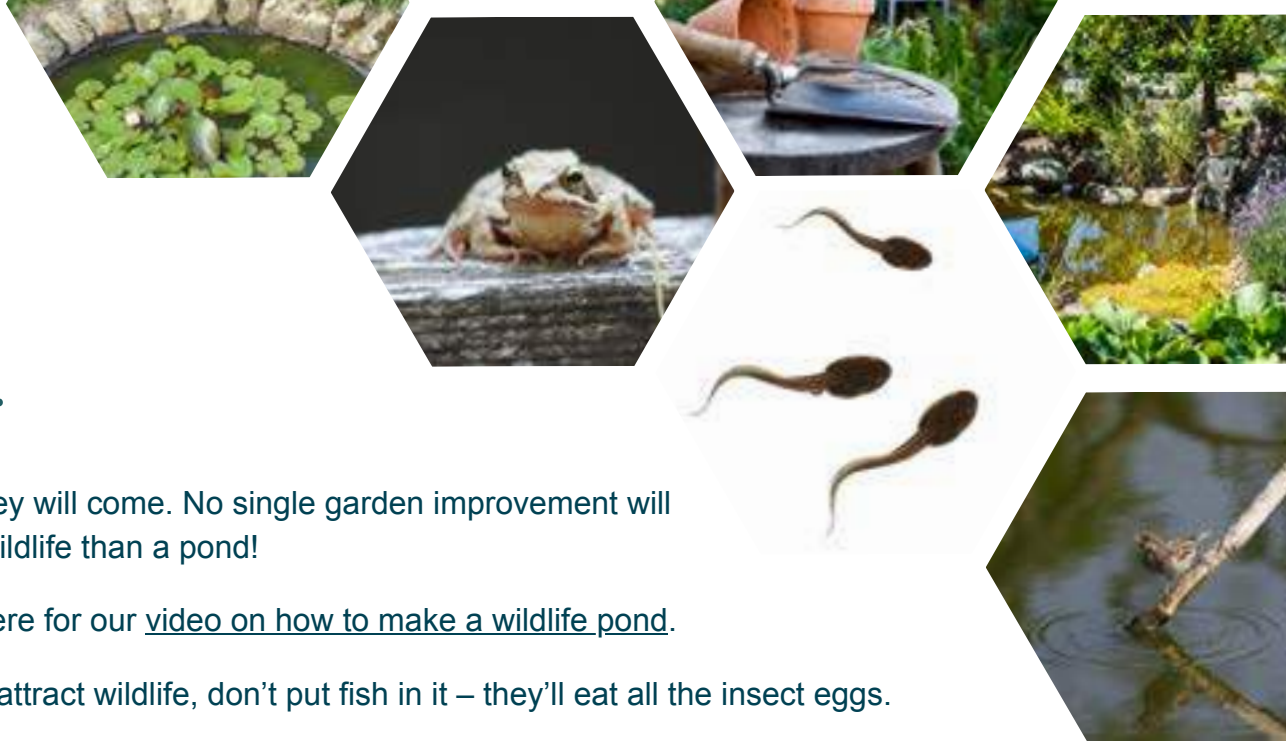
Compost heaps are home to a huge array of insects and invertebrates but can also provide shelter for small mammals. If they are nesting or hibernating when you want to empty the compost heap, try to leave them a bit longer before disturbing them.

[Click here for TCV's three-minute guide to composting!](#)



“Remember that the animals and plants have no M.P. they can write to; they can't perform sit-down strikes or, indeed, strikes of any sort; they have nobody to speak for them except us.”





Water

Build it and they will come. No single garden improvement will attract more wildlife than a pond!

Take a look here for our [video on how to make a wildlife pond](#).

If you want to attract wildlife, don't put fish in it – they'll eat all the insect eggs.

On the smaller scale is an old sunken washing-up bowl, placing a large stone inside it for birds to perch on while washing.

The wider and deeper the pond, the more wildlife you'll attract though and with a combination of oxygenators and some surface plants, the water will stay fresher for longer. Provide some dense vegetation on one side of your pond so that mammals can approach the pond to drink without being exposed.

If you have young children, maybe consider a mini bog garden. The same procedure as a pond, just line it with overlapping plastic compost bags so the ground stays damp but there's no standing water.

Bird tables

Bird tables are common in gardens, and food can also be left on the ground or hung from trees in feeders. Try to ensure that you maintain a constant food supply throughout the winter: it could be a matter of life or death to small birds.

Fruit

Fruit trees can feed animals as well as you. Leave windfalls lying for birds. Blackbirds especially like apples that have been left on the ground to rot for a while.

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Nettles

Nettle patches may be something you would rather get rid of, but if you have an out-of-the-way corner where you can let them grow you will be rewarded by the number and range of butterflies which lay their eggs there.



Walls

Walls make great habitats too. Insects may make homes in the cracks and holes. Old walls may have mosses, ferns and lichen on them.

Sunny south-facing walls are used by butterflies sunning themselves before taking off. Or you may be super lucky and attract reptiles such as the Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)!



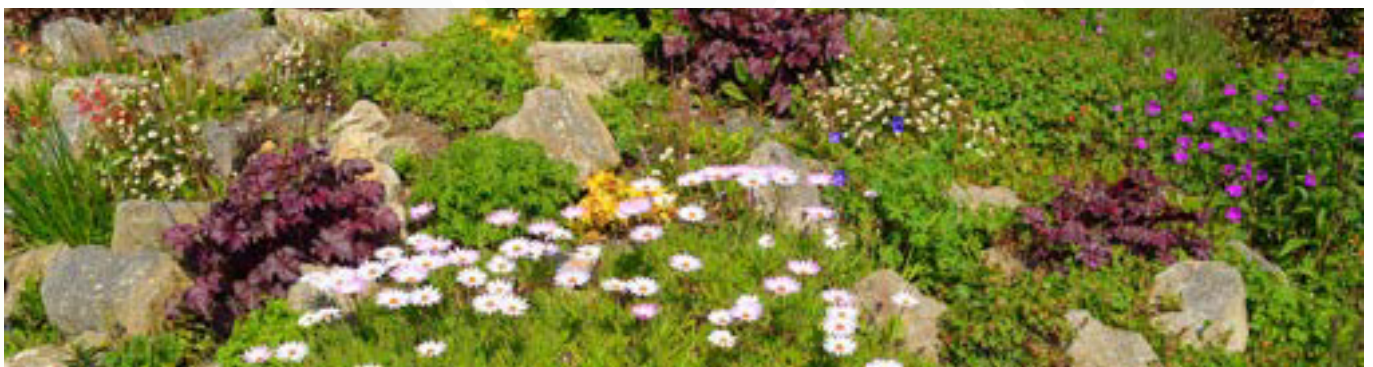
“It is, surely, our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth.”

Sir David Attenborough, TCV Vice President

Rockeries

Rocky areas make a visual variation in any garden but also allow all sorts of creepy crawlies to live underneath the rocks.

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Nesting boxes

You can put up nest or roosting boxes to house birds and bats. Remember if you are building them yourself to use wood which has not been treated, as the chemicals used can be harmful to the tenants.

Take a look here for our [video on how to make a bird nestbox](#).

Insect blocks are nest boxes for insects. Try a block of wood with small holes drilled part way through, or a bundle of straws each with one end blocked, or leave out a builder's ventilation block.

“The natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty, the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.”

Sir David Attenborough, TCV Vice President

Climbers

Climbing plants have multiple uses. They may be used for insects to bask and lay eggs on, or as food and nectar. Birds use them to shelter from the elements and may also nest there.

A sunny wall is best for the majority of climbers but ivy will happily grow in a more shaded spot and provides a fantastic late-season source of nectar for bees and other pollinators, which in turn can also give feeding birds a boost of energy before winter or migrating south.

These ideas are designed to start you off, but let your creativity loose in your plans, and above all enjoy it.

There is a world out there waiting to be tempted into your garden and discovered. Good luck!



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Useful publications

- Wildlife Gardening by Charlie Ryrie. Publisher: Cassell Illustrated; ISBN: 1844030350
- How to Make a Wildlife Garden by Chris Baines. Publisher: Frances Lincoln; ISBN: 0711217114
- Creating Small Habitats for Wildlife in Your Garden by Josie Briggs. Publisher: Guild of Master Craftsmen; ISBN: 186108188X
- Creating a Flower Meadow by David Bellamy (Foreword) and Yvette Verner. Publisher: Green Earth Books; ISBN: 1900322080
- Creating a Garden Wildlife Pond by Dave Bevan. Publisher: Ringpress Books; ISBN: 1860542123
- Making Wildflower Meadows by Pam Lewis, Dame Miriam Rothschild (Preface). Publisher: Frances Lincoln; ISBN: 0711221332
- The Wild Garden by Violet Stevenson. Publisher: Frances Lincoln; ISBN: 0711212740

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