

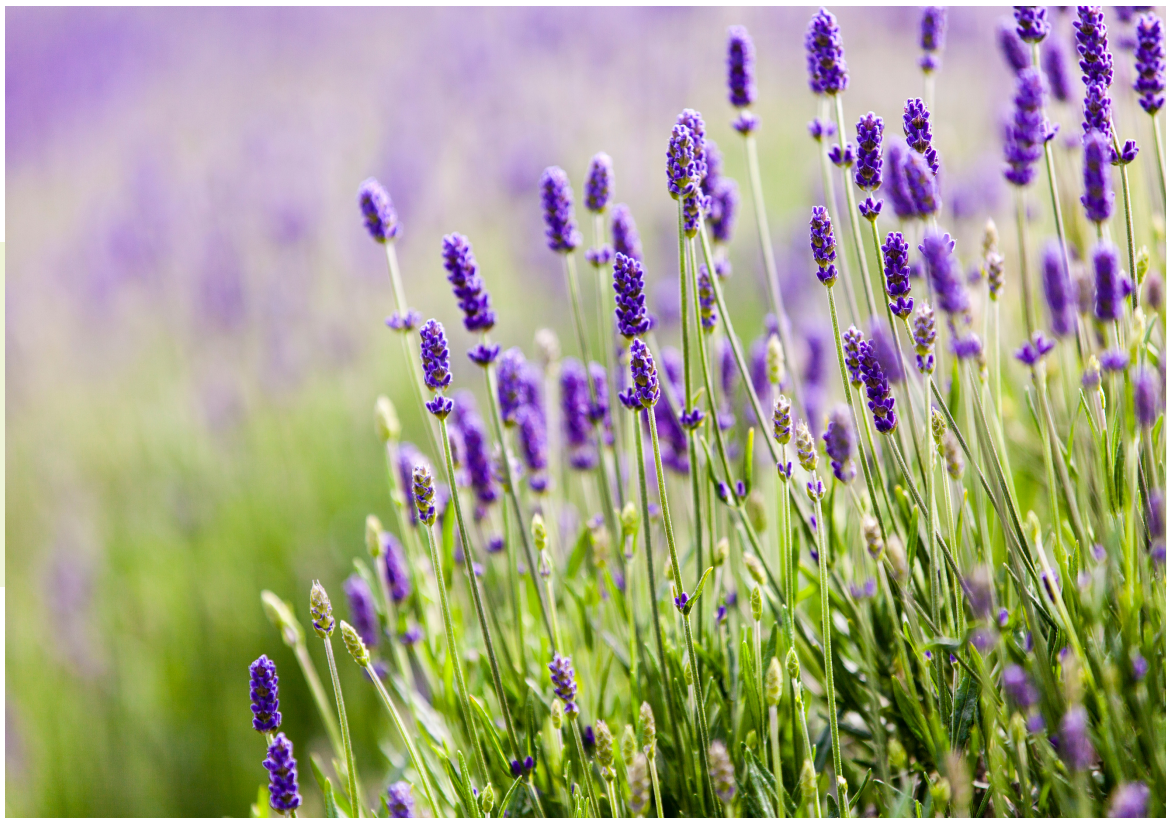
CREATING A WILDLIFE GARDEN: 10 EXPERT TIPS TO GET STARTED



Are you looking to transform your garden into a wildlife haven but do not know where to start? Here are ten expert tips to help you create the perfect wildlife-friendly space. Make your garden into an oasis for birds, bugs and other critters.

What are the best plants for attracting wildlife?

- Bee Balm
- Coneflower
- Echinacea
- Lavender
- Marigold
- Nasturtium
- Phacelia
- Petunia
- Salvia
- Sunflower



Why should you encourage wildlife in the garden?

Climate change, habitat erosion, and diseases like those that affect bees are all putting our native wildlife under a greater strain than ever before. Yet, with just enough effort, we can all do our bit to help by encouraging birds, mammals and bugs to visit and live in your garden. This can assist with taking care of nearby untamed life, keep important green spaces flourishing and control garden bothers by empowering normal hunters. “I only have a small urban garden,” you say, “what difference can I make?” All homes can be made more wildlife-friendly by adding window boxes or large gardens.

What is meant by garden ecosystem and food web?

Ecosystems

The term ecosystem refers to a system of organisms working together in a community and responding to their environment. Ecosystems are interdependent and dynamic systems of living organisms interacting with the physical environment.

There are many different types of ecosystems; forest ecosystems, marine ecosystems, etc. Gardens are also a type of ecosystem which often provide food and shelter for thousands of creatures throughout their lifecycles; this is vital to a healthy and vibrant living garden.

A healthy ecosystem also functions to benefit humans, reducing the risk of flooding, reducing air pollution and softening extreme weather. By their nature, they are variable, with a diversity of plants that can surpass that of natural ecosystems.

Combined with resources like ponds and compost heaps, gardens can deliver a variety of habitats in that wildlife thrives.

Food web

A food web is the interplay of different food chains, each made up of a sequence of what eats what. An example of a simple food chain is nasturtium-blackfly-ladybird-swallow, where each link in the chain eats the one before it. But of course, there are many other things which for instance eat blackflies, which takes us into other food chains, hence the concept of a bigger food web.

Sometimes species are grouped by how they feed into what is called functional groups. In a garden with a healthy ecosystem, all of these groups will be well represented.

To enjoy sharing our gardens with wildlife further up the food chain, such as hedgehogs and robins, it's important to remember that they need a plentiful supply of beetles, caterpillars, earthworms, etc which in turn need even more plants and other smaller invertebrates to sustain them!



Do I need to have a wild-looking garden to garden for wildlife?

No. The style of your garden is entirely up to you, but it is beneficial to have some areas of the garden that are less disturbed. Rather than allowing your garden to go wild or become untidy, the key to great wildlife gardening is to provide wildlife with a variety of plants and habitats.

Do I need to plant just native plants if I want to support wildlife?

No. It has been demonstrated through research carried out at the RHS and supported by the Wildlife Gardening Forum that non-native plants—that is, plants that do not originate from Britain—play a beneficial role in assisting wildlife in gardens. It's important to plant a lot of British native plants in your planting plan, but it's not necessary to plant only native plants.

10 Top Tips for Wildlife Gardening

1. Choose your plants carefully

Plants that bloom and fruit at different times are essential for a wildlife garden. This is because it is important to provide food and shelter throughout the year. This will guarantee that no matter what the season is, wildlife will still find your garden appealing.

As they provide native animals with natural food sources and places to live, native plants are the best choice for a wildlife garden.

Additionally, native plants are a more sustainable option because they require less care and water than non-native plants. However, you can use any plant in the garden (so long as the garden matches the plant growing conditions), native to the UK or not.

2. Provide water

Adding a water feature to your garden can attract a wide variety of wildlife, including birds, frogs, and insects, which all require water to survive. You can even add a few aquatic plants for added beauty to a small pond or birdbath for the job.

3. Create habitats

Different species of animals require different habitats to thrive. Incorporate a mix of trees, shrubs, ground cover, and flowering plants to provide a variety of habitats for different wildlife. Nesting boxes provide safe, secure spaces for birds to raise their young. You can purchase ready-made nesting boxes or make your own using recycled materials.

4. Limit chemical use

Pesticides and herbicides are harmful to wildlife, and their use should be limited or avoided altogether in a wildlife garden. Instead, consider natural pest control methods, such as companion planting and attracting beneficial insects.

5. Provide shelter

Animals need shelter to hide from predators, rest, and sleep. You can provide shelter by planting dense shrubs and trees or adding birdhouses and bat boxes.

6. Choose a sunny location

Most plants require sunlight to grow, and wildlife will also be more attracted to a sunny garden. Choose a location that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight each day.

7. Create a border to attract wildlife

Wildlife garden borders are a great way to get started in wildlife gardening. Typically they consist of plants beneficial to wildlife. However, they can also be used to replicate specific natural habitat types.





Our top 10 plant species for a wildlife border would be Birch, Crap apple, Holly, Lupins, Foxglove, Dogwood, Hostas, Sunflowers, Lavender and Grape vines. So many plants can be used as they are all beneficial to nature in different ways. It is worth thinking about what it is you want from the plants and what can thrive in your growing conditions.

8. Make a wildflower meadow

Wildflower meadows usually flower between May and September and attract a wide range of pollinators. You can buy seed mixes tailored to specific wildlife such as bees, butterflies and seed-eating birds. Wildflower meadows can be large or small, even a small area of ground or border can be transformed into an attractive and valuable pollinator-friendly mix of grasses and wildflowers.

Most meadow seed kits can be sown between March and April, or in September. On lighter soil, autumn-sown seeds generally germinate and establish quickly. Most meadow plants need full sun and well-drained soil. However, tailored seed mixes for other locations, such as semi-shade and coastal sites are available from specialist suppliers.

9. Reduce problematic visitors

When we say problematic visitors, we mean cats, some birds and pests that may harm the wildlife in the garden. As mentioned above, everything has a food chain, and these animals that we may find problematic can actually be beneficial. However, we don't really want cats getting into certain plants or pooping in the garden. We have a separate article full of ideas on [how to stop cats pooping in the garden](#).

10. Provide bird food

You don't need a fancy bird feeder, a simple bowl on a table or floor will work. Bird foods can be easily purchased in many places, or you can attempt to make your own (but be careful with what ingredients you use as some preservatives that are ok for humans may harm wildlife). Little seeds, like millet, draw in for the most part house sparrows, dunnocks, finches, reed buntings and caught birds, while chipped maize is taken promptly by blackbirds. Peanuts and sunflower seeds are favorites of tits and greenfinches. Mixes with chunks or whole nuts are only appropriate for winter feeding. For many birds, pinhead oatmeal is excellent. Although wheat and barley grains are frequently included in seed mixtures, they are only suitable for ground-feeding pigeons, doves, and pheasants, which frequently repel the smaller species.

Bonus: Add a compost bin

A compost bin provides a natural fertiliser for your garden. Your plants will grow stronger and healthier as a result of this, which will attract more wildlife. Compost bins can often promote more insects, which will benefit your wildlife garden.



How to encourage specific species to a wildlife garden

Encouraging bats in the garden

Do you enjoy spending a summer evening in the garden, watching the sun set and the bats begin to fill the night sky. These little creatures often live closer to us than you would think. Bats use our gardens as an important source of food, water and shelter. As their natural habitat becomes more scarce, our gardens are playing a very important role for bats.

Since bats are a sign of a healthy, green environment, designing a garden that attracts bats will also benefit people. To encourage bats in the garden, plant night-scented flowers, build a pond, put up a bat box, reduce artificial lighting and keep cats indoors at night.



How to get more bees in the garden

Bees visit flowers to gather pollen and nectar, which they use to feed their larvae and themselves. They are essential pollinators of numerous garden and wild flowers because they move from flower to flower. To attract bees to your garden, fill your garden with RHS Plants for Pollinators plants, allow lawn weeds to flower by cutting less often, provide water for pollinators, avoid using pesticides and provide plenty of nest sites for wild bees.

Bringing butterflies to the garden

Planting a lot of vibrant flowers in the garden is an easy way to attract more butterflies because they consume nectar. Primroses, bluebells, lavender, and other flowers are popular with butterflies. Your flowers should be grown in a bright, sunny location that is protected from the wind. Plant them in a large pot or window box if you have less room.