

Guidance Sheet on the Creation and Management of

Wildlife Habitats in Gardens

This sheet is intended as a basic guide for house owners to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of your own backyard and private gardens. **Wildlife Habitats in Gardens** has been identified as a priority habitat in the **Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Blaenau Gwent**.

Biodiversity quite simply means 'all living things'. It is the rich variety of wild plants and animals around us together with the habitats that support them.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species associated with this Habitat include:

Badger	Great crested newt
Hedgehog	Common frog
Pipistrelle bat	Common toad
Water vole	Palmate newt
Bullfinch	Brown hawker dragonfly
Linnet	Bluebell
Song thrush	Cowslip
Spotted flycatcher	



Pipistrelle bat

© Mike Hammett

What is a Wildlife Garden?

Gardens can provide a wealth of wildlife. They are important refuges for many resident and migratory species, particularly birds. As a nation, we look after more than one million hectares of garden. A mature garden, with minimal pesticides and fertilisers, can host some 60 bird species, 300 plant species, and thousands of different insects. With the countryside under increasing threat from modern farming and forestry practices leading to the widespread use of chemicals, removal of hedgerows, and draining of wetlands, every garden, big or small is a potential nature reserve.



Church grounds can be great places for wildlife

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Gardens that offer the most diversity are generally characterised by mature native shrubs, trees, and old hedges. They also support Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority species such as the song thrush, common frog, common toad, and newts, and may even attract hedgehogs and badgers.

Factors Affecting Habitat

- Habitat loss and fragmentation arising from development.
- Pesticides and fertilisers are detrimental to biodiversity.
- The over-tidying of gardens, where there is a lack of decaying material left for micro-organisms and invertebrates.
- Drainage of garden pools, ponds, and boggy areas reducing habitats suitable for amphibians and aquatic species.
- The introduction of non-native ornamental plants that are of low value for wildlife.
- Domestic pets such as cats can be a threat to wildlife, in particular, wild birds nesting and feeding in gardens.

Top Tips to bring Wildlife to your Garden!

- Wildlife basically has four basic needs – food, water, shelter and places to breed – so the more of these you offer – the more you will attract.
- Go organic! You can have an attractive and productive garden without using chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and slug pellets that may poison birds and hedgehogs. Use compost, well rotted down manure instead of chemical fertilisers, make your own compost heap, try companion planting to avoid pest problems, and hand weed paths and paved areas. Encourage gardener's friends such as ladybirds that eat greenfly. Frogs, toads, and mammals such as bats and hedgehogs, are also beneficial as these eat insects and slugs. Remember, once you have attracted wildlife, they will help you with your gardening!
- Favour native trees and shrubs that are more attractive to local bees and butterflies, than exotics. Suitable tree species include aspen, wild cherry, common ash, common oak, common whitebeam, crab apple, field maple, goat willow, holly, hazel, rowan, small-leaved lime, and silver birch. Suitable shrub species include alder buckthorn, common blackthorn, common dogwood, dog-rose, guelder rose, hawthorn, and spindle.
- Plant a native hedge along the boundaries to your property that will provide cover, food, and a suitable nesting site for many birds. Good native choices include blackthorn, hawthorn, dog-rose, field maple, hazel, and holly. Also, remember to cut any hedges and trees outside the bird-nesting season (March-September). Most native hedges only require cutting once every 2 years. Try and always leave some areas unmanaged that will provide a berry source for birds over the winter months.
- Create a garden pond or boggy area designed with wildlife in mind. A pond will attract frogs, newts, and dragonflies providing it is not stocked with ornamental fish. The pond should be positioned well away from trees and preferably in full sun. Your pond should have plenty of shallow edges and be at least 1m deep in some areas to prevent freezing in Winter. Different pond sizes will attract different wildlife, but generally the bigger the better. Dragonflies will breed in ponds as small as 4 square metres, whereas, toads and great crested newts, prefer larger ponds (15 square metres or more). If you haven't got room for a pond, provide a source of drinking water for birds and other wildlife.



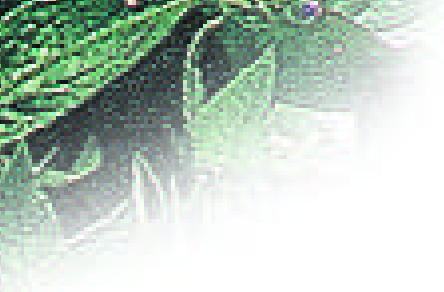
Native tree planting

©BTCV



Wildlife pond

- Bring vibrant colour into your garden by creating a wildflower meadow. All or part of a small lawn can be turned into a miniature meadow simply by halting the mowing ritual and preventing spraying with a weedkiller. Wildflowers can then be sown or planted as plugs into the area. Generally, cowslip, primrose, ox-eye daisy, meadow cranesbill, lesser knapweed, meadow buttercup, self-heal, and red clover will all do well. Wildflower meadows should be cut after the flowers have set seed. All cuttings will then need to be raked up and removed to prevent nutrient build up.



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Wild flower meadow in a garden of a local business



©Paul Glendell-EN

Create piles of dead wood

- Create borders for butterflies by planting with nectar rich flowers like buddleia, scabious, and iceplant. Plant in a sheltered, sunny spot. Also, plant hop for comma butterfly, nasturtium for large white, buckthorn for brimstone, and retain some patches of nettles for small tortoiseshell, red admiral, and peacock butterflies. Contact the Countryside Council for Wales for a list of over 200 plant species that are valuable to wildlife. The list can be downloaded from www.ccw.gov.uk. Search for 'Plant for Wildlife'.
- Create a herb garden. Herbs are excellent for wildlife and easy to buy. Plant species such as chicory, marjoram, lemon balm, catmint, comfrey, fennel, rosemary, thyme, feverfew and alkanet. It will soon be buzzing with bees.
- If you don't have a garden or only a paved area, grow wildflowers and herbs in containers such as beer barrels, tubs, chimney pots, clay plant pots, window boxes, and hanging baskets. Remember to only use nutrient poor soil in which to plant wildflowers, not topsoil or compost, as this will kill them.
- Grow climbers such as wild honeysuckle, quince, and ivy on fences and walls. These will provide nectar rich sources and make suitable nest sites for birds, as well as a haven for insects, and small mammals.
- Erect bird and bat boxes. Locate away from places where predators might attack from, such as overhanging branches, and not in full sun. Contact the RSPB for more information.
- Remember to feed birds throughout the year as they will come to rely on this food-source. Food to put out includes mealworms from pet shops, wild-bird seed for finches, fruit for thrushes, nuts for tits, and fat for woodpeckers.
- Try not to be too tidy! - leave piles of logs, leaves, rubble, or rocks in the garden as ideal homes for small mammals, especially hedgehogs, and mini habitats for many other animals and insects. Make sure that you check for any hibernating hedgehogs before lighting any fires.

- Make your own natural fertiliser! Recycle garden waste and vegetable kitchen scraps in a home-made box or bought compost bin. Compost bins can be obtained from the Council at a heavily subsidised rate.
- Use peat free compost such as chipped bark, leaf mould, or coir and help save our peat bogs. Peat bogs are very special places for wildlife, but partly due to gardeners' demand for peat, nearly all have been destroyed in the UK. Only use compost on vegetable patches or under trees and shrubs, not on areas where you want to encourage native or nectar rich plants.
- Look after garden birds by avoiding carrying out any tree, shrub, or hedgerow work during the bird-nesting season between March-July. This work should be carried out between October to March.
- Further advice should be sought on types of species to use, planting techniques, and aftercare and management.

Further Advice



Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership
Provides advice on the restoration of priority habitats and species within the County Borough.
Tel. 01495 355702



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Administers the Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme that offers landowners and community groups small grants up to £2k for biodiversity projects.
Tel. 01495 356070
For further advice on composting and subsidised compost bins
Tel. 01495 355616



Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)
Runs a hotline for more advice on how to bring wildlife to your garden.
Tel. 02920 772400



RSPB South Wales Office
For advice on attracting birds into your garden and making bird and bat boxes
Tel.02920 353015

Please note, the recommendations contained on this sheet are for guidance purposes only. Due to the complexity of individual sites and the interactions occurring within them, it is advisable to seek specialist advice with relevant organisations from the early stages. This sheet can also be downloaded from the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership website called 'The Web of Life'. This can be accessed through www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.