

Prepare for the bird breeding season

This month, concentrate on getting ready for the summer bird breeding season.

1. Start by spring cleaning any bird feeders or existing nest boxes that you have up to prevent spread of disease. Empty out any old nests and other material, then use a mild detergent to disinfect the box. This will help prevent disease and infection in birds that choose to nest here. Make sure this is done as early as possible.
2. If you don't have any up already, consider putting bird and bat boxes up in your garden. You can buy good quality boxes from many suppliers, or if you are feeling crafty, you can make your own using the dimensions shown here. Make sure you use untreated wood.
3. Site boxes 3-5m above the ground, on houses, sheds or trees, out of direct sunlight and away from the prevailing wind.
4. When feeding the birds, avoid peanuts from now on as they can cause illness and even fatalities in chicks.



Plant berrying and fruiting deciduous trees – a mixture of native and non-natives works well e.g. Elder, Guelder Rose, Rowan, Hawthorn.

Meadow management

Order seed for a wildflower meadow. This could be a small bed or a whole field depending on what suits you! You can order ready-made seed mixes, including grasses and wildflowers such as Oxeye Daisies online from websites such as Emorsgate Seeds.

Plants in flower in January

Snowdrop



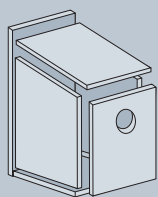
Snowdrop



Take a pledge to use only ethical products in the garden and avoid products that cause damage to habitats and species e.g. avoid slug pellets and use peat-free compost!

Build a nestbox

If you'd like to help the birds in your garden, why not make a nestbox? Use a plank of wood about 150mm wide and cut it to the sizes shown on the diagram. Hinge the lid with a strip of leather or rubber, so you can clean out the box in autumn.



	200mm	250mm	120mm	460mm	200mm	220mm+
150mm	Side	Side	Base/floor	Back	Front ○	Roof/lid

Entrance hole is 25mm for blue tits, 28mm for great tits, 32mm for house sparrows

Cut at 45° angle



Make a home fit for a queen

Early in the spring, generally from March onwards depending on the weather, Queen Bumblebees will emerge from hibernation to feed and look for places to build their nests. They use structures like old vole or mouse nests. You can help them by leaving some early Dandelions in the garden to provide an essential early source of nectar and by building a bumblebee nest by following these instructions:

1. Find a dry and sheltered sunny area in the garden to site your nest. On a bank is ideal as this will be well drained but if this isn't possible, use a flowerbed or the bottom of a hedge.
2. Get a clay flowerpot, of a depth of 20cm or deeper and half-fill it with nesting material, such as shredded paper, dry grass or straw.
3. Attach a 5cm length of hosepipe (25-30mm wide) to the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot.
4. Bury the pot upside-down in the soil, so that the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot is facing upwards and the entrance to the hosepipe is poking out of the soil.
5. Add a 10cm tall upright stick near to the entrance to the hose pipe. This will help you remember where it is and will also be used by the bumblebees later in the summer to find their way back to the nest.



It's a good time now to put food out for Hedgehogs which may be coming out of hibernation and Badgers which may be struggling to find food towards the end of winter. Do not feed bread or milk which can cause illness, but instead put out a mixture of dog food and rolled oats.



Meadow management

On a dry day, prepare a small (or large!) patch of ground for a wildflower meadow. Wildflowers require soil that is low in nutrients, so if you can, start by removing the top soil. Scratch the soil with a rake but don't rotovate as this could bring unwanted seeds to the surface.

Plants in flower in February

Native Welsh Daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus* 'obvallaris'), Primrose, Dandelion

Mammal watch

Survey tips: Look for tracks, signs and droppings on paths and in areas of long grass e.g. Mole hills or Harvest Mouse nests. Put out a camera trap and some food and see what the trap catches on video.



Fox



Mole



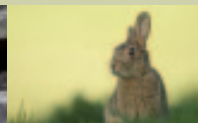
Hedgehog



Badger



Bats



Rabbit



Grey Squirrel

Any other mammals:



Create a compost heap

A compost heap is a great way of getting rid of your kitchen and garden waste, whilst creating food for your garden and a home for wildlife at the same time. Invertebrates such as beetles and worms will feed on the decaying matter, which in turn will attract Slow Worms, Hedgehogs and Toads.

1. Choose a sunny spot as this will help the compost rot down more rapidly.
2. Buy a ready-made container or make one from recycled pieces of timber. Try to have a few gaps in the side of your bin which will allow wildlife such as Slow Worms in and out. Make sure it has a waterproof lid.
3. Anything green can be put in your compost heap – weeds, fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, paper. Avoid putting in cooked food which will attract rodents, or ash and faeces which will change the condition of the compost.
4. The compost will be ready when it looks dark brown and earthy.



Wood Anemone

Meadow management

If you have an established wildflower meadow in its second year or older, you might want to cut it to a height of 50-100mm now to prevent grasses becoming too dominant.

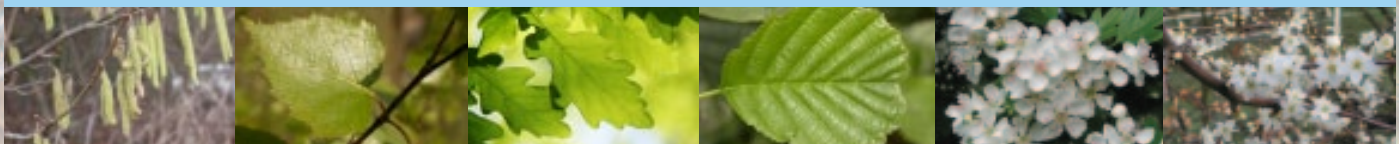
Plants in flower in March

Sallow
Wood Anemone
Crocuses



Spring tree identification

Survey tips: Look for old leaves at the base of the tree, examine the bark and look for buds or defining features like catkins and cones.



Hazel

Silver Birch

Oak

Alder

Hawthorn

Blackthorn

Any other trees:



Make a deadwood garden

Log piles are another good creature feature to add to your garden. They will provide areas for shelter and food for many different species, including amphibians, Hedgehogs, lizards and invertebrates such as beetles. Fungi and lichens will also quickly colonise the dead wood.

1. Collect together logs and sticks of various different shapes, sizes and species of tree.
2. Find a shady area of the garden.
3. Pile them together. You can be as neat or as messy as you like as long as you create lots of cracks and crevices for wildlife to crawl into!



Put out nesting material to help the birds e.g. feathers, wool, string, moss, dog hair. Avoid materials that chicks could get their legs tangled in like cotton wool and wiry horse hair.

Gardener's friends

Help your veggies grow by encouraging natural pest controllers to visit your garden.

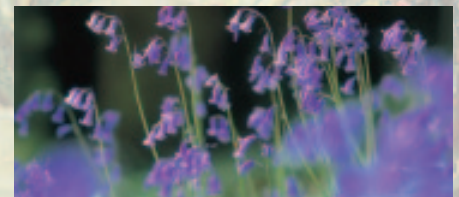
- **Ladybirds and hoverfly larvae are natural predators of pests like aphids, so plant some of the pollen-rich plants that they like, such as marigolds, chives and fennel.**
- **Frogs, Toads and Newts all eat slugs. Add a pond to your garden (instructions in the November sheet) to encourage them in.**
- **Glow Worms (which are actually beetles) eat slugs and snails. You can help them by providing shelter for their predatory larvae in the form of log piles.**
- **Hedgehogs are big eaters of slugs and snails, help them in your garden by installing hedgehog holes in fences so they can move easily between gardens and avoid using slug pellets which cause poisoning of hedgehogs.**

Meadow management

Now is the time to sow your wildflower meadow. 5g per m² is usually sufficient – scatter it on the ground and then either roll the soil or walk over it to ensure the seed is in good contact with the soil. Water lightly. If it is in a small area, you can put twiggy sticks over it to protect the soil and seeds from birds and cats until they start growing.

Plants in flower in April

Bluebell
Lesser Celandine
Muscari



Arriving migrant birds

Survey tips: Keep your eye to the sky! Familiarise yourself with the songs of these birds by listening to them online. If you're new to bird calls, Chiffchaff is a good one to start with. It simply sounds like 'chiff chaff, chiff chaff, chiff chaff'!



Chiffchaff



Blackcap



Swallow



House Martin

Any other migrant birds:



Build your own 'Btingham Palace'!

This is a great activity for adults and children alike! 'Insect hotels' can come in any shape and size. You can go large and use stacked pallets as your frame, or you can use a smaller container like a small wooden box or a plastic bottle with the end cut off. It's entirely up to you. They will benefit all kinds of critters, from solitary bees to lacewings. There is no right or wrong way to build an insect hotel so just have fun and get creative.

Try to fit some of the following features into it:

- Hollow plant stems e.g. bamboo canes
- Twigs and sticks
- Straw
- Logs (bark on) with different size holes drilled into the end
Make sure they are all over 90mm deep
- Corrugated cardboard rolled up in a waterproof container
- Sand
- Bricks and stones (whole and broken)

You can create a deluxe hotel by leaving some empty space for Hedgehogs and Frogs at the bottom of your insect hotel and adding a green roof on the top – simply cover the roof with sacking or similar, with some holes at the side for drainage that won't leak into the hotel, cover with compost and seed with wildflower meadow mix.



There are likely to be chicks in nests for the next few months, so leave hedges and trees untrimmed to give them extra protection.



Plants in flower in May

Bird's Foot Trefoil
Herb Robert
Meadow Vetchling



Lacewing

Herptile hunting

Survey tips: Visit ponds at night with a strong torch and shine it into the water to see Newts, Frogs and Toads courting and egg laying. Put out metal or rubber sheets in quiet areas of long grass and look on top and under them on warm mornings to see if reptiles are present.



Common Frog



Common Toad



Slow Worm



Common Lizard



Grass Snake



Great Crested Newt



Smooth or Palmate Newt

Any other reptiles and amphibians:



Plant a nectar café

The garden will now be coming alive with bees, butterflies and other nectar-loving invertebrates, which you can help by creating a nectar café.

1. Choose a sunny, sheltered spot in the garden and mark out a flower bed.
2. Remove the turf and turn over the soil in preparation for planting.
3. Plant out a variety of plants to try and ensure that nectar is provided from spring right through to autumn. Suggestions can be found on each page of this guide.
4. Choose native varieties over cultivated plants, which are unlikely to produce as much nectar.
5. Add climbers that also produce berries and hips for added bonus e.g. Honeysuckle, Dog Rose, Ivy and Black Bryony.
6. Attract moths with night-scented plants like Evening Primrose and Night-Scented Stock.



Create an abode for toads

An easy thing to do for wildlife this month is create a place where toads and frogs can shelter from the heat of the sun and from predators.

In a grassy area, near the pond if you have one, dig a chamber 3-4cm deep with a sloping entrance. Cover this with a paving stone to create a perfect hidey-hole.

Alternatively, get an earthenware flowerpot and gently knock a small hole in the side. Place in a grassy area.



Suggested plants that will flower at this time of year:

Foxglove
Red Campion
Yellow Rattle
Honeysuckle

Bumbles and other bees

Survey tips: Plant a nectar café as described above and see what visits!



Buff-tailed/White-tailed Bumblebee

Red-tailed Bumblebee

Common Carder Bumblebee

Tree Bumblebee

Hairy-footed Flower-bee

Honey Bee

Tawny Mining Bee

Any other bees:



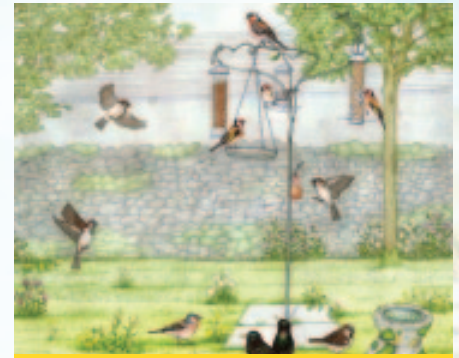
Build a home for newts

A rock pile is a great thing to add to your garden for wildlife, especially in conjunction with a garden pond. Amphibians such as Great Crested Newts and Toads will crawl into the cracks in the stones for shelter and hibernation sites, and they will be used by a myriad of invertebrates.

Creating a rock pile is incredibly simple. Just follow the steps below:

1. Choose a site for your rock pile. Near to a pond is ideal as newts and other amphibians will not have to go far to find shelter. Even better if it is amongst long grass as this will provide food and a safe passage between the pond and shelter.
2. Source some stone. This could simply be rubble from a nearby building site – newts aren't fussy! But if you would like it to look neater, you can source some more decorative stone.
3. Pile the rocks together any way you wish, but ensure that there will be spaces in between the rocks and under them for newts to crawl into. Newts are unlikely to climb so it would be better if the rock pile is wider than it is high.

If you're up for a challenge, you could turn this rock pile into a drystone wall. To find out more, contact your local Wildlife Trust.



Make sure the bird bath is kept topped up with water in hot weather. It will be used by invertebrates and mammals as well as birds.

If you don't have a bird bath, put out a plate of water, slightly elevated on a brick or up on a table.



Oxeye Daisy

Meadow management

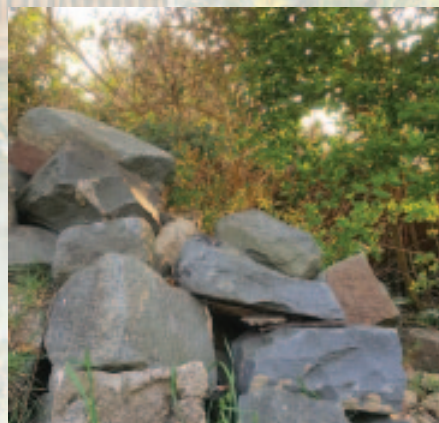
To help the flowers establish well in your meadow, give it a cut now in its first year to stop the grass taking over. Make sure you remove the cuttings. Remove unwanted weeds like docks. A perennial meadow will not usually flower in its first year.

Plants in flower in July

Oxeye Daisy
Round-Headed Leek
Teasel
Evening Primrose



Smooth Newt



Dragonfly detecting

Survey tips: Look for dragonflies and damselflies around ponds, lakes and streams on warm, sunny days in the summer months. A pair of close-focussing binoculars can be very useful.



Common Blue Damselfly

Blue-tailed Damselfly

Large Red Damselfly

Southern Hawker

Emperor Dragonfly

Broad-bodied Chaser

Common Darter

Any other odonata at other times of year (dragonflies and damselflies):

Broad-bodied Chaser: Mark Robinson

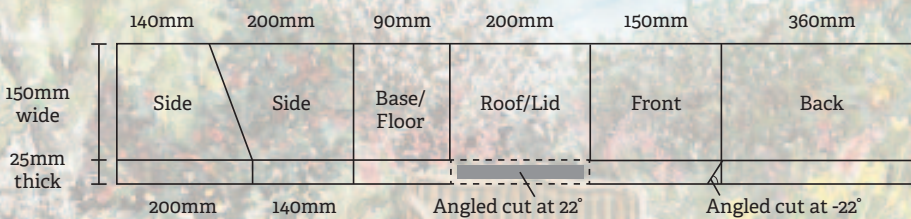
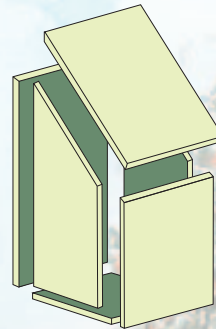


Put up bat boxes

Make a home for bats in your garden and put up bat boxes on large trees or buildings. Be aware that bats are protected, so avoid trees or buildings that you wish to do work on in the future where possible.

1. You can buy good quality boxes from many suppliers, or if you are feeling crafty you can make your own using the dimensions shown here. Make sure you use untreated wood and choose wood with a rough texture to give bats something to cling to.
2. Site boxes 3-5m above the ground, on trees or houses, in partial sunlight and away from the prevailing wind. A clear flight path to the box is preferential for bats.

Don't worry if your bat box isn't used straight away, bats are quite particular and will move around according to time of year.



Meadow management

If your wildflower meadow is now in its second year or older, it will need a cut in August or September. Cut it to a short height (between 5-10cm), then allow the clippings to lie for a few days to let the seeds drop. It is then essential that all cuttings are removed to prevent nutrients building up in the soil. These can be composted.

Plants in flower in August

Borage
Devil's-Bit Scabious
Fennel
Kidney Vetch

Install a water butt

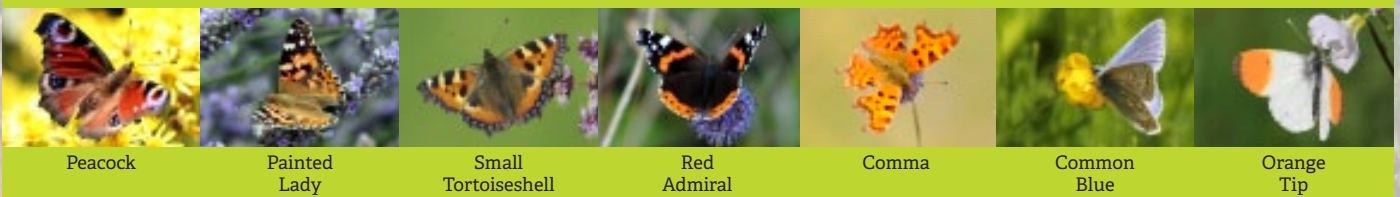
Water butts are used to store water from the roofs of buildings following rain. They reduce the amount of water entering the water system during storms, which reduces the pressure on our local rivers. They also provide a free source of water from the garden. Why not install one on your house or shed?

If you'd like to try something a bit more challenging, why not create a rain garden from the drainpipe instead of a water butt? Contact your local Wildlife Trust for more information.



Butterfly watching

Survey tips: Plant nectar-rich plants in your garden and see what visits.



Any other butterflies:



Build a reptile hibernaculum

Now that the weather is cooling down, it's time to start thinking about how you could help wildlife survive the winter. There is a novel kind of raised bed you can build which will also provide hibernation sites for wildlife, known as 'Huglekultur'. It provides a home for wildlife whilst also providing a rich soil for your plants. To make your own, take the following steps:

1. Start by choosing a dry area, preferably where the raised bed will have long grass or other vegetation around it.
2. Mark out an area of 1m x 2m (or bigger if you like!), with the long side facing south.
3. Take the turf off this area and set it aside, then dig a trench 20cm deep.
4. Fill this trench with large logs in a non-regimented way, roughly forming the shape of a bank up to 1m high. This will create chambers below the frost level where reptiles, amphibians and other species can hibernate.
5. Cover this log pile with smaller branches and twigs.
6. Place the turf over the top, grass-side facing down and cover with the earth from the trench, plus extra if required.
7. You can then plant vegetables and wildflowers on top of the mound. The wildflowers will attract pollinators to your vegetables and the reptiles and amphibians living in the bed will take care of the pests for you!



Goldfinch

When clearing flower beds, leave seed heads of plants like Agrimony, Teasel and Sunflowers for finches to feed from over the winter.

Flowers are now likely to be less abundant, so feed butterflies and other insects by mixing sugar into hot water and pouring into milk bottle lids.

Plants in flower in September

Self-heal
Heather
Red Clover



Common Frog

Tracks and signs

Survey tips: Look for paw prints in wet mud, hair on the bottom of fence lines and on brambles, and for droppings on boundary lines. Opened hazelnuts under hazel trees can show if you have small mammals nearby.

Detect Hedgehogs by encouraging them to walk across an ink pad and piece of paper using food as bait.



Fox Paw Print



Badger Paw Print



Hedgehog Paw Print



Nibbled Nuts

Harvest Mouse Nest

Any other tracks and signs:

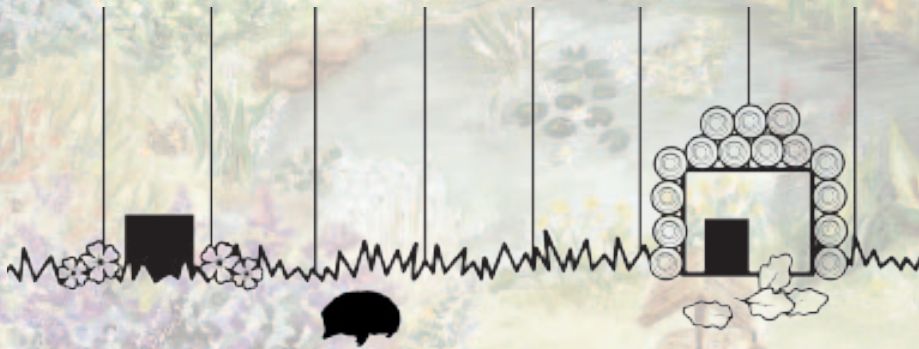


Help a hibernating hedgehog

Hedgehogs are declining across the whole of the United Kingdom, due to loss of habitat, busy roads and obstructions to movement. Neat and tidy gardens may not provide many opportunities for Hedgehogs to nest or hibernate, so you can help by building a Hedgehog box for them. This can be as basic or fancy as you like, just as long as it's waterproof and well-ventilated.

1. Build or find a wooden box of approximate dimensions 30 x 40 x 30cm high.
2. Create an entrance tunnel or hole in the side of the box approximately the same size as a CD case (13cm x 13cm).
3. Cover the floor of the box with sawdust or earth.
4. Cover the box with plastic sheeting to keep it dry and position it in a pile of leaves or logs near a compost heap or in a shady overgrown corner.
5. Leave some bedding material outside for hedgehogs to take into the box such as leaves or straw.

Hedgehogs need to travel a surprising distance to find food, water and mates. You can help them by creating Hedgehog corridors between yours and your neighbours gardens. Cut a hole in your fence, the same size as a CD case (13cm x 13cm). This will allow Hedgehogs to come and go easily.

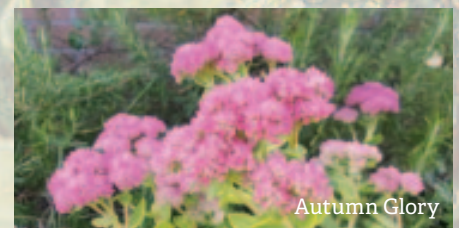


Leave mature Ivy uncut if possible, as it is an excellent late source of nectar for insects.



Plants in flower in October

Ivy
Hardy Garden Verbena (*Verbena rigida*)
Autumn Glory



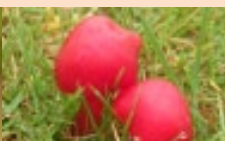
Autumn Glory

Fungi foray

Survey tips: The best time to go out looking for fungi is just after rain in the autumn. Look on deadwood, living trees, in your lawn and patches of soil.



Fly Agaric



Waxcaps



Jelly Ear



Cobalt Crust



Scarlet Elf Cap



Turkey Tail

Any other fungi:



Dig a wildlife pond

Creating a wildlife pond is the best thing you can do for wildlife in your garden or outdoor area. They provide breeding places for amphibians and homes for numerous invertebrates, which in turn encourage other wildlife such as bats and birds. It is also beneficial to your garden, as Frogs, Toads and Newts all eat slugs! To create your own, follow the steps below:

1. Find a sunny area of flat ground, away from too much shading. This will provide the ideal conditions for wildlife in the pond and allow essential oxygenating plants to grow.
2. Decide on the size and shape of your pond. Irregular edges are best as they create many different micro-habitats with areas of different depth, shade and temperature. The most important thing with a wildlife pond is that a variety of depths are provided, with lots of shallow areas and the sides gently slope to the deepest point. If space is limited, you can just create one sloping side. A deeper zone of over 60cm is perfect for over-wintering species.
3. From this plan, decide how much liner you need. We recommend butyl rubber as it is cheap, easy to use and does the job well. To work out how much you need use the following formula:
$$\text{Width} + (2 \times \text{max depth}) \times \text{Length} + (2 \times \text{max depth})$$
4. Start digging! Dig a trench out around the edge of your pond that you can bury the edges of the liner in for a neat finish.
5. Once you have dug out your pond shape, remove any sharp stones and line the hole with old newspaper, carpet or similar material to protect your liner. Unroll the liner – let overhanging edges fall into the trenches.
6. Add a layer of sand as substrate for plants and animals .
7. Place stones and logs around the edge of your pond to create shelter for future visitors.
8. Now you can just sit back and wait for the rain to fill your new pond!
9. To support as much wildlife as possible, plant your pond with native pond plants. A suggested (but not exhaustive) list is provided here.

If you have any questions, contact your local Wildlife Trust.

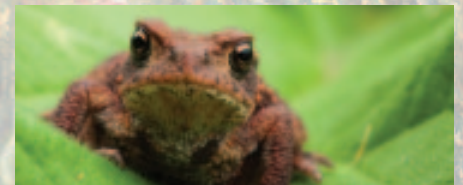


Recommended native plants

Water Starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*) – favoured by newts for egg-laying
Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) – provides upright stems for dragonfly and damselfly emergence
Spiked Water Milfoil (*Myrophyllum spicatum*) or Potamogeton species – submerged plants for oxygenation
Bog-bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) – pretty and creates floating mats for egg-laying dragonflies

Plants to avoid at all costs

New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*)
Parrot's Feather (*Myrophyllum aquaticum*)
Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*)
Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*)



Avoid adding fish to your pond as they eat many pond-dwelling invertebrates. Fountains are also not recommended as the mechanism can be deadly for invertebrates.

Spot these birds

Survey tip: Put out food for birds in various different places e.g. on a table, hanging feeds or smeared in crevices in trees and see what comes to enjoy the meal.



Blue Tit

Great Tit

Chaffinch

House Sparrow

Blackbird

Dunnock

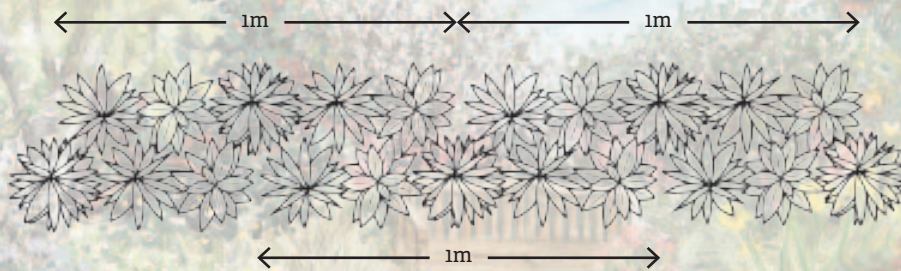
Robin



Plant a native hedge

Planting a native hedge is a brilliant way to divide a garden, define boundaries and hide unsightly features, and they are of great value for wildlife, acting as corridors for movement from place to place and for providing food and shelter. Follow these steps to plant your own hedge:

1. Choose some native hedgerow trees to suit what you want, such as Holly, Yew, Hawthorn and Hazel. The best hedges have many different species in them so choose at least four. Choose some evergreen species to provide shelter in the winter.
2. Dig over the site, removing all weeds and roots, then mix in lots of well rotted manure to give your new trees the best start.
3. To get a nice thick hedge, plant 5 plants per metre in two staggered rows.
4. Water well.
5. When the trees are a few years old, consider planting climbers such as Honeysuckle and bulbs such as Bluebells.



Winter bird care

Feed

Hang bird feeders and put out food on the ground and bird tables. High quality seed can be bought from Vine House Farm (vinehousefarm.co.uk), with a proportion of profits going to the Wildlife Trusts to support wildlife conservation. You can also put out kitchen scraps such as pieces of apple, stale cake and cheese, but avoid bread and dessicated coconut, which can cause birds to become unwell. To make your own fat balls, melt some fat (lard or suet) and pour into a tub.

Mix in the seed and pour into yoghurt cartons or similar to hang from trees or your bird table. Lastly, leave berries on plants such as Holly to provide natural food sources.

Water

Add a bird bath to your garden and make sure it is kept topped up, clean and free of ice. You can also make sure your pond is easily accessible to birds with shallow sloping sides.

Shelter

Empty your nest boxes and give them a good clean to give birds a place to shelter inside in the winter.

