

GARDEN IMPROVEMENTS



WILDLIFE ACTIVITY PACKS

*A fun guide full of activities you can do at home
to get creative and learn about wildlife.*



ACTIVITY 1

Start a compost heap

For the
whole
family

Composting is not only an environmentally friendly way to get rid of your waste, it also provides an important habitat feature for a range of insects and other creatures.

Open compost heaps, like those often found on allotments, will also provide food for insects, birds, small mammals and even reptiles and amphibians.

Compost heaps are great for grass snakes and other reptiles like slow worms and common lizards because the rotting vegetation generates a lot of heat, meaning that the heap is a great place to lay eggs. Grass snake eggs, rather than being hard shelled like bird eggs, have softer leathery feeling shells. Even if you are not a keen gardener and have no use for compost, creating a compost heap can be a great resource for wildlife!

If you want to start a compost heap in your garden you can buy a purpose built plastic compost bin (although these aren't as good for hedgehogs, amphibians or reptile), or you can make one yourself.

There are two main designs for making your own. The first involves four posts and some chicken wire, while the other involves pallets or metal sheeting which are pinned in place with wooden posts and are used to hold all the garden waste in one place. The first design can also be used as a leaf mould cage, where you can pile up any leaves that fall in your garden over winter and it will eventually rot down and be great for the garden.

The important thing about composting is getting the balance of air and moisture right. Layering your compostable material in the right way will help create air pockets and allow for the movement of detritivores – insects which love to eat rotting plant matter. Having a mix of material from leaves to grass cuttings, kitchen waste, plant cuttings and larger branches will provide lots of nutrients as well.

Ideally you want to start off with some small to medium size branches, as this will allow the gradual movement of smaller pieces down to the bottom. Then adding leaves and grass cuttings will provide smaller items which break down to produce nutrient rich soil. Adding in leftover raw fruit and vegetables will provide some liquid to the mixture, but you may need to water the compost heap periodically to ensure there is enough moisture in the content for worms to move around the heap. If you are moving your compost around using a fork, always do it slowly and make lots of noise so that any wildlife knows you are there and can move out of the way.

Top wildlife that uses compost bins and leaf mould cages:
Worms • Insects • Spiders • Hedgehogs • Mice • Grass Snakes • Slow Worms
Common Lizards • Blackbirds and other garden birds



ACTIVITY 2

Make a wildflower area

For the
whole
family

Help all kinds of wildlife in your garden by making a wildflower area. Wildflowers are a great option for almost any garden, no matter how small! You can even have a wildflower window box or plant pot if you do not have a garden.

Wildflower meadows are crucial to wildlife, but across Europe, these habitats have been drastically reduced. This is bad news for the pollinators such as bees and butterflies who depend upon them for both nectar and shelter for their young. By sowing areas in gardens, we can help these struggling insects to survive and flourish.

Studies have shown that gardens should ideally be at least 70% native plants and 30% non-native plants to support a wide variety of wildlife. If you don't like the idea of a whole wildflower patch, try and integrate some native wildflowers into your planting areas. Oxeye Daisy, Corncockle, Forget-Me-Nots, Red Campion, Corn Chamomile and Corn Marigold all look great in any garden style.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1 Select the area you want to create a wildflower meadow and get some wildflower seeds. If you buy native wildflower seeds, these will have the best chance of germination and have the most benefits to native wildlife.
- 2 Dig up the area - you want to remove the grass layer as the grass will compete with your wildflowers. Turn the soil over and remove any roots and weeds. Do not add compost.
- 3 Add your seeds to a bucket with some sand and spread your wildflower seeds evenly across the area a hand full at a time.
- 4 Water the area. You may need to keep watering a couple of times a week if the weather is particularly dry, but this is not essential.
- 5 Cut and rake off all the vegetation in September and again in February (you can pile your cut vegetation in a corner of your garden for an additional wildlife habitat!). Removing the vegetation prevents dominating plants growing such as brambles, nettles and thistles.

OUR FAVOURITE WILDFLOWERS FOR THE GARDEN:
Yellow Rattle • Red Campion • Corn Chamomile • Corncockle • Cornflower
Oxeye Daisy • Birdsfoot Trefoil • Black Knapweed

ACTIVITY 3

Create a wildlife pond

For the
whole
family

Help all kinds of wildlife in your garden by making a pond. No matter how small your garden is, a pond of any size will provide, at the very least, an important water source for wildlife in the hot summer months!

Ponds have their own aquatic ecosystems with intricate and complex food-chains. Hundreds of animals rely on ponds for at least part of their lifecycle. By installing a pond, you will significantly increase the number of animals in your garden, particularly our declining amphibians. They also help by providing a supply of drinking water for birds and hedgehogs.

Liners are one of the most common ways to create a wildlife pond but pre-moulded (resin) models are becoming more popular as they are more durable and easier to install.

HOW TO MAKE A POND FROM A WASHING UP BOWL OR PLANT POT/BARREL:

- 1 Pick your location (see our top tips for ideas).
- 2 Dig a hole just large enough to put your washing up bowl or pot into (you could have several pots all at different heights and depths to provide different areas for different species). Alternatively, you can just place one on the ground or on a patio if you don't want to dig it in – remember to put a ramp in for frogs though!
- 3 Make sure there are no gaps around the edge of the pond so your pot is flush with the ground and there are no holes for wildlife to fall in.
- 4 Put logs, stones and any natural items you have in and around the pond to create hiding places and shelters for wildlife. Putting logs at the back of your pond will provide somewhere for newts and frogs to shelter in winter.
- 5 Put in a ramp or a float so any animal that falls in can get out.
- 6 Then fill your pond with rainwater or allow to fill naturally every time it rains.
- 7 Spread wildflower seeds around the pond and put in any pond plants you want. Having tall plants like iris or purple loosestrife in the pond will give something for dragonflies to rest on and maybe even emerge from your pond one day!

OUR TOP TIPS FOR PONDS:

- 1 Try to create sloped edges with rocks or sediment to allow animals such as breeding amphibians, bathing/drinking birds and mammals access in and out of the pond. Many pre-moulded models come with steep sides that animals cannot get out of if they fall in.
- 2 Try leaving an uncut area next to the water's edge to provide cover for migrating amphibians.
- 3 Pond vegetation is incredibly important. Submerged plants such as hornwort produce valuable oxygen while floating vegetation like lilies offer cover for tadpoles and insect larvae. Edge vegetation such as water mint, marsh marigold and sedges provide sites for amphibians and dragonflies to lay their eggs.
- 4 Ponds without fish have a much greater biodiversity in them so try to keep them at a minimum or create a separate pond for each.
- 5 Try not to have your pond where it will receive sun all day as it will get too hot and this will stop some wildlife from using the pond. Near a bush or in an area of partial shade is perfect.



ACTIVITY 4

Make a log pile

Age
10 - 15

A log pile is one of the easiest changes you can make to your garden, is great for wildlife and its perfect for going on mini beast hunts!

All you need is a spade or trowel and some logs. The size of the logs doesn't matter, but avoid treated wood if you can as this might put off a lot of insects from using the area.

THERE ARE TWO MAIN WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A LOG PILE
either way is great for all kinds of wildlife:

- 1 A stag beetle pyramid style where the logs are upright with a big section underground for stag beetle larvae to feed on.
- 2 Lay the logs down and sink them into the ground slightly.
Simply dig a small area just big enough to put your logs in, for the stag beetle design you will want to go quite deep (you will probably want longer logs for this design) whilst the laid down option just needs to be a few centimetres deep to stop the logs rolling around (and providing somewhere else for soil insects to live).

Then simply put the logs in and put the soil back in around them to hold them in place. You could add some smaller branches/leaves on top to provide extra shelter.

If you think a log pile will look scruffy, it doesn't have to, you can make a feature of it and have a large log wall in a corner of the garden.



ACTIVITY 5

Plant a tree for wildlife

For the
whole
family

Planting a tree is not only fun but it can be a very interesting way to see how trees grow in size compared to children. Plant a small tree (known as a whip) and watch as it grows with you; it's amazing how quickly they can overtake a person!

Trees are fantastic for wildlife – they provide shelter, shade, food and oxygen! Native trees can provide homes to hundreds of species of insect, each of which provides loads of food for bats, birds and mammals.

We always recommend planting a native tree in your garden because it will have the most benefits to wildlife and has a higher chance of surviving than non-native trees. There are trees and shrubs of all sizes to fit any garden. You can grow many trees and shrubs in pots or prune them each year to keep them smaller.

When planting your tree, you don't have to dig a huge hole, but the wider the hole the better as it will provide space for the roots.

Some trees and bushes that look good but are also good for wildlife include:

- Bird or Wild Cherry
- Guelder Rose
- Rowan
- Crab Apple
- Dog Rose
- Spindle

Some trees that also make great native hedges:

- Blackthorn
- Hawthorn
- Buckthorn
- Dog Rose
- Spindle
- Honeysuckle

Larger trees (which could be grown in pots if you are short on space):

- Rowan
- Cherry
- Silver Birch
- Hawthorn
- Willow
- Buckthorn

**For more guidance on tree planting in Ipswich contact the wildlife team:
wildlife.team@ipswich.gov.uk**



ACTIVITY 6

Build a bird bath

Age
10 - 15

Another really simple change to the garden is to install a bird bath. Water sources in the garden are great for providing water for drinking, bathing and cooling down in. Birds are prone to a lot of pests and diseases, so baths are very important for keeping clean and cooling down in the summer months.

Keeping a clean source of water in your garden can help all kinds of wildlife. Placing dishes of water or bird baths at different heights can help a range of different types of wildlife, from insects and birds to mammals.

What you will need:

- A shallow dish – this can be anything from a saucer to a plant watering dish to an old saucepan
- A large pot or some bricks
- Some small stones
- Water

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1 Fill your saucer with pebbles or stones so that there will be a layer at the bottom for insects to sit on and drink. You could have stones on one half and the other open, so birds have a deeper area to bathe in.
- 2 Turn your large pot upside down where you want your bird bath.
- 3 Then balance your saucer on top and fill with water.
- 4 Empty out the water every few days and scrub the bowl to stop the spread of any disease.



ACTIVITY 7

Hedgehog friendly garden

Age
10 - 15

Hedgehogs can be a gardener's best friend. They love to eat the kinds of insects that can be a pest to our plants and vegetables such as caterpillars, beetles and snails. Making your garden hedgehog friendly means your garden plants will be happier and you will have helped an animal that is really struggling at the moment.

Here are some ideas for how to make your garden hedgehog friendly:

- 1 Create a hedgehog hole in gates/fences so the hedgehogs can travel between gardens.
- 2 Stop the use of chemicals and slug pellets in the garden.
- 3 Plant native wildflowers and leave areas long to provide foraging areas for hedgehogs.
- 4 Make an open compost heap/leaf mould area so hedgehogs can nest.
- 5 Make hedgehog houses and place them around your garden.
- 6 Make a hedgehog feeding station and feed with meat flavoured wet or dry cat or dog food.
- 7 Leave trays of clean water around the garden or make mini ponds so the hedgehogs can drink.
- 8 Put ramps in your ponds and in any drains/holes in the garden so hedgehogs can get out if they fall in.
- 9 Be careful when cutting grass and hedges in the garden – check for hedgehogs first.
- 10 Plant native hedges so that hedgehogs can use the leaves for nests and maybe even nest under.

We would love to see how you have made your garden hedgehog friendly! Share your garden changes and your prickly friends with us on social media by tagging @ipswichgov or #ipswichparklife



ACTIVITY 8

Bee friendly garden

Age
10 - 15

Bees are hugely important for the natural world and for humans! In fact, bees pollinate about three quarters of all the plants around the planet, including the crops that we eat. So, it is important that we try to help them in our gardens however we can.

There are three main types of bee – solitary bees, bumble bees and honeybees. Honeybees are the type of bees found in hives, these are usually not native whilst solitary bees and bumble bees are native and very important for pollinating wildflowers.

You can help all different types of bees in the garden by:

- 1 Reorganising your garden so that the plants you use are at least 70% native and 30% non-native. Although non-native plants are beautiful and many bees can use some of them, our native wildflowers are much better! This goes for trees too – native flowering trees like blackthorn, hawthorn, buckthorn, cherry etc. are also great for our native bees.
- 2 When choosing non-native flowers, make sure that they are single flowered, not double flowered. This means that they are daisy shaped and that you can see the centre of the flower. If you can't see the centre of the flower or it is very tiny its unlikely to be very good for pollinators.
- 3 If you like roses in your garden use old English, climbing native style roses. These are much more like our native dog rose which is a great summer nectar source for bees.
- 4 If you can't have a garden that is all wildflowers, create as much of a wildflower area as you can. Grow wildflowers in pots, in window boxes or even just a 1m x1m square will do.
- 5 Remember that it's not just about bees, other insects will thrive in a garden designed for bees too. Add some night scented stock, jasmine, honeysuckle, nicotine plants and red valerian to your garden. These will produce scent at dusk and at night which makes them great for moths!
- 6 Make use of every available space – create window boxes, green roofs to your sheds and create a green roof over your bins, grow plants up trellis up your wall/fence/shed to maximise the space for bees – it will look beautiful too!
- 7 Leave the "weeds". A weed is simply a plant perceived as being in the wrong place. If you embrace these plants, they don't have to be a weed. Let dandelions grow in spring as an early nectar source, leave daisies, clovers and buttercups in your lawn and let forget me knots grow in your flowerbeds – the bees will love it!
- 8 Plant ivy, honeysuckle and other native climbers like dog rose up your fence or trellis. These provide both shelter from the rain as well as a lovely nectar source, plus they smell great too!
- 9 Plant early flowering plants and trees in your garden like blackthorn and cherry to provide early shelter.
- 10 Leave some dead stems of plants in winter – some solitary bees will nest or lay eggs in the stems of dead plants. Alternatively, if you don't like the look of dead plants in the garden, use the stems to make a bug box or bug mug!

There is plenty you can do to help our bees and their insect friends in the garden. Let us know what you will do to make your garden more bee friendly this year!

