

Now that we're all inspired by all the various programmes on TV to create a space in your garden for wildlife, it's time to roll your sleeves up and get stuck in. So where do you start? First, take a look and see what you already have in your garden, it could be that you already have a haven that you didn't know existed which is thriving with bugs, slugs, snails and insects – all hearty meals for the various wildlife that visit your garden. Birds eat snails, caterpillars and greenfly. Slugs and snails are also eaten by toads, frogs, slow-worms, hedgehogs, shrews and beetles. Then you need to have a think about what you want to focus on:

- Environmentally friendly maintenance – compost all your organic and green waste, install a water butt, buy peat-free compost, avoid using chemical pest control methods – pick off pests, prune out disease and dig out weeds.
- Wildlife planting – There are lots of wildlife-friendly flowers that are cheap and easy to grow in just one season.
- Habitats – it's easy to create a habitat for insects, bugs, hedgehogs and birds, just follow our advice.

Environmentally friendly garden

Make the best use of your space and get extra points from the competition's judges for environmental awareness features like composters, water butts and wormeries. The City Council opposes the use of peat-based products and there'll be extra points for gardens using alternatives.

If you do decide to use a chemical for pest control, choose one that is approved for use against the pest, disease or weed you are targeting and use it at the right time.

Rather than using artificial fertilizers, try using good old manure.

Wildlife planting

Complement your garden with planting that encourages more insects and bugs. Simple open forms of flower are best, where the pollen and nectar are within easy reach of visiting insects. Colourful annuals (plants that complete their life-cycle in just one year), such as cornflowers, nasturtiums and poppies, provide seed for birds and nectar for butterflies, bumblebees and other insects. Native plants such as forget-me-nots, buttercups and daisies, are easy to grow, look pretty and also supply nectar.

For longer-term planting grow native species, such as cowslips, cranesbills and foxgloves. Let thistles and teasels go to town in a 'wild' corner – their seed heads are magnets for finches in autumn.

Habitats for wildlife

You'll be amazed at the variety of creatures that can share your patch if you provide the shelter they need. Why not leave a pile of logs in a corner of your garden and small creatures, such as woodlice, earwigs, centipedes, moths and beetles, will love it. Rockeries are great for gardens and wildlife, leave some rocks quite loose and create lots of little holes for mini beasts as well as spaces where newts and toads can hide in autumn and winter.

Make your own bird box – it's easy and fun. (See link) Make sure you put it in a sheltered spot not facing the sunlight directly and away from cats. Over the next 10 years your box could give a home to more than 100 baby birds.