As our climate changes, gardens are becoming even more vital to wildlife and people. They can provide shade, absorb carbon, soak up flood water and help to cool buildings.

A well managed network of gardens stretching across Sussex will contribute to the creation of a living landscape, helping wildlife to move more freely and adapt to climate change.

Skill Level: 3 out of 5
Time of Year: November to March

- **Wildlife Friendly**: A mixed hedgerow will provide food and shelter for birds, mammals and invertebrates. It will also provide wildlife highways so species can move more easily through the landscape.
- **Climate Friendly**: Hedges create cool, shady places in what might otherwise be a hot exposed site.

**Things to Consider**

- Include mostly native plants. Generally these provide the best habitat for the widest range of wildlife. Try to mix at least five different species throughout your hedge.
- Aim for varied foliage, fruits and flowers throughout the year.
- Include evergreen and thorny plants for winter shelter as well as protection from predators.
- Add trees if you have space. This will provide greater diversity, height and shading. Good medium-sized trees include holly, crab apple and rowan. Good larger trees include oak, ash, whitebeam and silver birch.

**Getting started**

**What type of plant?**
Choose bare-rooted plants, which are inexpensive and will generally establish well.

**When to plant?**
November to March when growth is slowest, but DON’T plant in frozen ground.

**How many plants?**
One plant per metre will give a reasonable hedgerow, but five per metre will provide greater variety and more rapid cover.

**What planting pattern?**
You can plant in a single straight line. For a thicker hedge, plant a staggered double line. For a more natural looking hedgerow, plant in an irregular pattern rather than in long blocks of the same species.
A Good Planting Mix:
- 70% from a choice of hawthorn, blackthorn, buckthorn, privet, beech, hazel and dog rose.
- 25% from a choice of guelder rose, field maple, spindle, crab apple, holly and yew.
- 5% from a choice of climbers, such as honeysuckle, blackberry, ivy and native clematis.

Planting Your Hedgerow (Step-By-Step)
1. Mark the shape and length of your hedge with cane and string.
2. Dig a trench along the line at least 45 cm wide and 30 cm deep (or big enough for the roots to fit comfortably). Double the width if you’re planting a double staggered row of plants.
3. Stack the displaced soil alongside the trench.
4. Remove weeds to reduce competition for water and nutrients.
5. Loosen the sides and base of the trench to help roots to grow and to improve drainage.
6. Place your plants in the trench one by one. Add plenty of peat-free organic compost as you back-fill with the spare soil around the roots.
7. Lightly firm the soil around the base of the plant until it is stable and level with the surrounding ground.
8. Keep the roots of waiting plants in a bucket of water or cover with moist soil. DON’T leave the roots exposed because they will dry out quickly.
9. Occasionally step back to check you are still following your planting line.
10. Water each plant so that the water reaches just beyond the depth and spread of the roots. Then keep plants well watered for at least one year until they are established. Preferably use rain water collected in a water butt and do not overwater.
11. Finishing touches: when your hedge is established you can add plugs of woodland edge species and native wildflowers

Make sure your plants come from reputable dealers and are not taken from the wild

Looking After Your Hedgerow:
- Remove weeds by hoe or by hand to reduce competition for water.
- Allow plants to establish for at least a year before pruning.
- Late winter is a good time to prune because fruit and berries will have been eaten and your plants will be dormant.
- Do not prune during spring or summer as you may disturb nesting birds and other wildlife
- Trim your hedge to keep it at the height and spread you want. If possible cut on a three year cycle (one side, top, the other side) to allow time for flowering and fruiting shrubs to develop.
- The best wildlife hedgerows are an ‘A’ shape, thick at the base and thinner on top to allow light through to the ground flora.
- Dead and decaying wood is an important feature of hedgerow. Providing they pose no risk of harm or injury try to leave dead branches and trees to rot down naturally.