



Sussex
Wildlife Trust

NATURE STREET

Gardens often have multiple uses from somewhere to relax, hang washing or have BBQs, to a football pitch or adventure playground for the kids. Your garden is a personal place to express your own individual style and tastes and gardening for wildlife doesn't need to compromise this.

Every garden will have some wildlife in it, whether you like it or not. These twelve guiding principles are designed to make the most of this and help you make space for wildlife in the way you want. They can be applied to any outdoor space, no matter the size, location or other uses. Please have a look through and think about what you can do to help the wildlife of Sussex.

guiding principles

1. Don't try to do everything, everywhere, all of the time

A garden doesn't need to be a miniature nature reserve to be brilliant for wildlife. Not every garden has to have a pond and a meadow and a hedge and an insect hotel. Work with what you've got and think about what types of habitat you can realistically offer.

Work with neighbours to increase the size and types of habitats you can create. In smaller spaces it may be better to have one very good piece of habitat rather than several different types that are small and fragmented. In larger gardens, smaller joined up sections of the same habitats can be more resilient to changing conditions, even better if they spread across several gardens in a street.

Nature street examples:

- Creating a few smaller, sympathetically managed ponds can be better than one large pond because they offer a variety of habitats and are more resilient to change. Should one of the ponds dry up or become polluted there will be others available to wildlife.
- A clump of flowers is more useful to insects than single flowers dotted about, particularly if pollinators can easily move between clumps.
- Your garden only has space for a stone pile. This might be small, but it will still be a valuable habitat for hibernating amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates, especially if one of the gardens around you contains a wildlife pond.

Did you know?

Common frogs, house sparrows and stag beetles are now thought to be more common in gardens than in the wider countryside.

Gardens are very important in providing excellent homes for a large number of our wild plants and animals. Generally they may not be sheltering many rare ones, but they do give homes to some of these, and with a bit of careful gardening they could be even better.



© Dave Kilbey & Tom Marshall

Common toads and hedgehogs need to be able to move through lots of gardens to find food, somewhere to breed and shelter.

2. Get connected

Insects, animals and birds need to move around for food, for different stages in their lifecycle and in response to weather events or disturbance. The most fantastic wildlife-friendly garden in the world, won't be any good if wildlife can't access it. Linking habitats within your garden and to your neighbours' gardens and the wider countryside will help wildlife move more easily into your space.

Nature street examples:

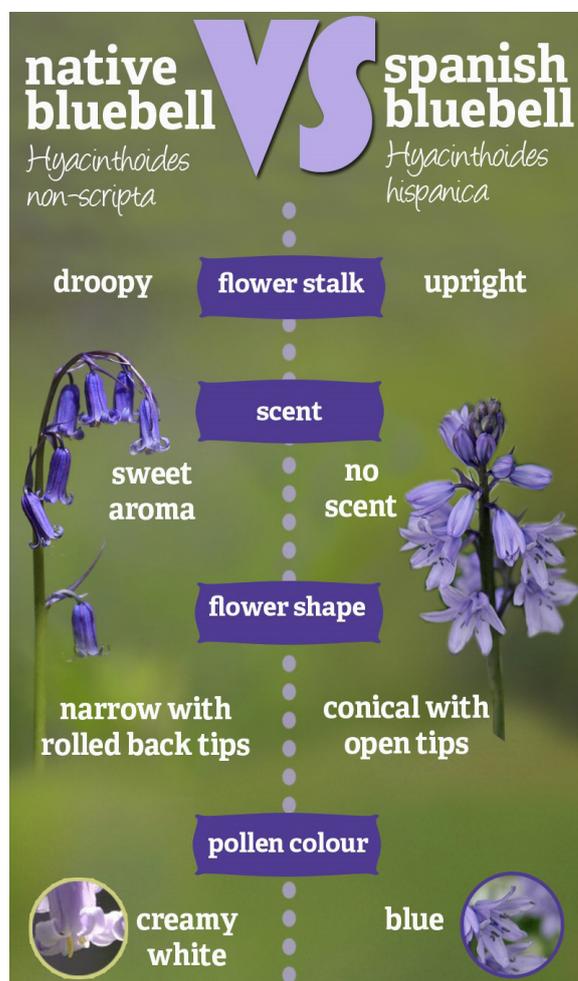
- You may only have space for a small, flower-filled border which blooms through the summer. To improve its value, connect it to a neighbour's nectar rich border by planting honeysuckle to cover your fences and encourage the pollinators to travel continuously between gardens.
- Wildlife emerging out of ponds benefit from long grass which gives refuge from the sun as well as predators. Further away, log and stone piles provide great places to shelter and find food.
- Creating gaps and holes in walls and fences gives low moving creatures, such as hedgehogs, frogs and slow worms, easier access through the neighbourhood.
- Night scented plants along walls and fences can help create and connect flight lines for bats.

3. Embrace where you live in the world

If you want to garden with wildlife in mind then be sympathetic to your surroundings. Consider the habitats around you and the way your garden could enhance or negatively impact them.

Nature street examples:

- If you live along a coastal strip and back on to a shingle beach, incorporate shingle loving plants to complement this habitat and reduce the likelihood of it being compromised by invasive garden plants.
- Chalk grassland is vulnerable to scrub encroachment. Buddleia and cotoneaster are introduced species that can quickly outcompete native chalk grassland flowers. If you back onto chalk grassland, consider avoiding these plants in your garden.
- If you back on to ancient woodland don't be tempted to tip old garden cuttings over the bottom of the garden fence. This can be detrimental to the woodland as it adds nutrients and increases the likelihood of garden escapees. For example the Spanish bluebell is hybridising with our native bluebell in many woodlands.



4. Living on the edge

The boundaries between different habitats are often very rich in wildlife, due to the variety of plants and microclimates you get in these places. By making these boundaries larger in gardens we can increase biodiversity. One way of doing this is to allow one habitat to slowly merge into the next. Think in terms of 'layers' in your garden rather than defined boundaries. Generally the more layers, the more wildlife.

In woodlands, for example, lots of the wildlife activity takes place at the woodland edge where greater availability of light supports a more diverse range of plants. This can easily be translated into garden proportions. A few metres is enough to establish the sort of dynamic habitat that will encourage butterflies and birds to feed on shrubs and flowers, and encourage hedgehogs and amphibians to forage amongst the leaf litter.

Nature street examples:

- Create a woodland edge with trees at the back, followed by shrubs such as dog rose and dogwoods and finally herbaceous plants and bulbs. The height should increase from front to back allowing as much light in as possible. If space is an issue, use smaller tree species such as rowan, holly, crab apple and hawthorn.
- If a woodland edge isn't to your taste, you could adapt your lawn area in a similar way. Create this layer effect by having shorter grass merging into longer grass, then low growing plants, ranker herbs then shrubs in your borders through to wall climbing species.
- Give ponds undulating and gently sloped sides. The soft edges should merge into the deep areas of the ponds allowing vegetation cover to move from marginal through to floating and finally submerged planting.

5. The long and short of it

Structure in gardens makes a big difference to the variety of habitats, food sources and shelter that your space provides. You want to aim for variety in structure rather than a uniform space.

Grazing for example, is a vital tool in conservation as it promotes structure, redistributes and removes nutrients, reduces the vigour of coarse grasses and helps increase biodiversity. Grazing is unlikely to be possible in most gardens. The closest you will probably get is mowing, but this isn't so beneficial as it produces an even sward length, leaves little structure and brings about an almost instant change across a whole area.

Nature street examples:

- Try to emulate grazing by not cutting your entire lawn all in one go. Experiment with different mowing patterns. Wildlife is not put off by straight architectural edges, or softer wavy lines in lawns.
- Remove and compost the cuttings to reduce nutrient levels in your lawn and encourage more flowers rather than just long grasses.
- Tall flowers with wide, flat heads can be perfect landing pads for butterflies. The stems can be used by dragonflies emerging from ponds, whilst lower growing leaves offer structure to ants.
- Remember short turf isn't always bad. It provides foraging space for blackbirds and badgers and allows shorter grassland fungi and plants to grow.
- Perennial plants can be left in borders and pots over winter. The hollow stems and old flower heads offer structure to invertebrates, such as ladybirds and lacewings, to shelter in over winter.
- Hedges cut in to an 'A' shape, a wide base tapering to a narrower top, allows light to flood into the hedge whilst creating a wide space at the bottom for creatures such as hedgehogs and toads to move along.

6. Think long term and support lifecycles

Many species have different needs for food and habitat depending on what stage of their lifecycle they are at. Different areas in your garden or in your street can meet these needs, especially for less mobile species. By incorporating the principles of longevity and variety into gardens, more resources will be available to species throughout the year.

Nature street examples:

- Consider what food plants different caterpillars need, as well providing nectar for the adult butterflies.
- Try to offer nectar and pollen sources throughout the year, from spring bulbs that provide food to emerging queen bees, to ivy and asters that flower later in the year.
- Offer birds natural, insect rich food sources in the spring and summer, whilst having berry rich plants to provide food in the colder months.
- Provide areas where newts, frogs and toads can hibernate, even if you don't have a pond for them to breed in.

8. Think outside the box

Don't feel that your space is too small to be valuable to wildlife, outdoor space of any size or shape has the potential to contribute. Vertical surfaces, textured walls, even bin stores and cycle sheds all can be used to create extra habitat.

Nature street examples:

- If space is limited consider growing plants on any surface you have from garage walls to shed roofs, even the space on top of a bird box can be used.
- Learn to love mud! Bare earth is an extremely valuable habitat that can be used by house martins for nest building, by solitary bees and hoverflies for egg laying and by reptiles for basking.
- The cracks and crevices in you patio or garden path can be used to plant low growing herbs such as thyme and camomile.
- Bird feeders can be hung on balconies over the winter months.
- Garden paths and windows can be lined with window boxes filled with annuals providing a nectaring hot spot.
- Drilling holes of varying diameter into gate posts can create nesting opportunities for solitary bees and places to overwintering for lacewings and ladybirds.

7. All day and all night

Gardens don't stop attracting wildlife the minute you go to bed. You might be surprised to see what wildlife turns up in your garden whilst you're safely tucked up in bed asleep. Remember that different species use spaces differently during the day and night.

Nature street examples:

- Plants are not just useful for day flying insects. Night scented plants offer the chance to attract night flying insects such as moths. These will help support other nocturnal wildlife higher up the food chain, especially bats.
- Water in your garden isn't only useful in a bird bath for your garden birds. Hedgehogs, bats and bees all need water to survive, so having it available at a range of heights day and night could make a big difference.
- Think about artificial lighting. Will it disturb the creatures you are trying to attract?



Honeysuckle creates a wonderful aroma in the evening that is sure to attract moths

© Alan Price, Gatehouse Studio

Did you know?

94% of lowland raised bogs in the UK have been damaged or destroyed due to peat extraction. 66% of what is extracted is used by gardeners, at a huge cost to wildlife.

The good news is that there are lots of alternatives to peat compost available that can produce some really fantastic results. There is now no need to use peat in gardens.

9. Go for natural homes and resources

Look at the habitats close to your garden and try to complement and enhance them. This will help to ensure there are enough resources to support the species you are trying to attract. It is rare that a single garden can offer all a species needs, but your neighbourhood as a whole could provide resources collectively. Natural habitat is always better in gardens than artificial homes, but if you do go for a man-made home, think about whether the wildlife has access to the materials they need to line nests or burrows, or enough food and water to feed parents and their young.

Nature street examples:

- Bird boxes in a concrete courtyard with no food or water nearby are unlikely to attract occupants.
- A native hedge is always a better home and food source in a garden than an artificial home, why not remove your fence and add a hedge instead.
- Mammal homes need to be placed in sheltered locations where there is lots of access to bedding material such as old leaves and grass cuttings.
- Feeding birds is a great way to get closer to wildlife, but the food you put out can't provide all the natural proteins and vitamins that healthy birds need. Remember to provide natural foods by planting berry and seed rich plants too.

10. Management with wildlife in mind

Gardens don't need to be 'wild' to be fantastic for wildlife. In fact a managed cottage garden with beautiful flower borders will attract much more wildlife than an untidy garden that has been left to brambles. However you do need to consider the impact your garden management could have. Think about whether the work you are doing will disturb wildlife. Those lovely sunny summer days may not always be best for pruning and clearing.

Nature street examples:

- Refrain from clearing ponds when they are thriving with tadpoles. If you really need to clear a pond wait until the quieter autumnal months.
- Don't be tempted to using chemicals to enhance the growth of plants. It is usually not necessary and only encourages vigorous grasses and plants to take over. Using organic methods to garden will have huge benefits for the food chain and water resources for wildlife and people.
- Leave cutting hedges until January or February once the berries have been eaten by hungry winter wildlife, but before birds start to nest.
- Don't relocate bug homes until freshly emerged solitary bees have left in March, April and May.
- Refrain from using slug pellets and other forms of chemical repellent as they can poison wildlife higher up the food chain such as birds and hedgehogs.
- Consider its value to nature when deciding whether you need to clear the algae or lichen growing on your garden path.



© Alan Price, Gatehouse Studio

Berry and seed rich plants will attract a wealth of wildlife to your garden.

11. Reuse, recycle and be a responsible shopper

Think about the bigger picture when deciding what to buy for your garden. The distance products have travelled and the processes used for their production can impact on the environment. 'Make do and mend' is a great approach to life in general, especially now we need to adopt more sustainable ways.

Nature street examples:

- Choose plants that benefit the environment and are not invasive or potentially harmful to the wider countryside.
- Avoid peat based products as peat extraction has huge environmental impacts.
- Use untreated wood to make animal homes. Why not recycle an old wood box or some timber planks.
- Re-use water from roofs for watering plants, filling bird baths and ponds. Washing up water can also be used for watering plants, but is best avoided for ponds.
- Add a compost heap to your garden, there are many shapes and sizes of container available, or you could make your own.
- If you decide to remove hard landscaping, can you use the waste to create new habitat features such as stone piles or rockeries?
- Use old containers and household objects for interesting or maybe quirky planters instead of buying plastic plant pots.

Need more help?

For more information on gardening for wildlife, just head to the 'discover in your garden' section of our website:

www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk

The four W's of wildlife recording...

What: Grass snake

Where: Woods Mill Nature Reserve, Henfield, BN15 9SD (TQ218136)

When: 26/6/15

*Who: John Smith
(jsmith@email.com)*

12. Notice what you see

It is vital that we continue to record the species and habitats found in Sussex so that we can understand how wildlife is being affected by human activity and try to manage sites to increase biodiversity. To help build up a clearer picture of wildlife in Sussex, why not start keeping simple records of what you saw, when you saw it and where. This will also help you decide if the changes you have made in your own space are helping to attract more wildlife.

Nature street examples:

- Wildlife records from urban areas are particularly important as there are relatively few records from built up areas.
- Leave a recording sheet pinned up in your kitchen or on a window ledge so you can note down things as and when you see them.
- You might like to choose different weeks to focus on different species groups. When you feel more confident, you could even start using professional recording apparatus such as a moth light trap.
- Use fixed point photography to record how your street or garden changes.
- There may be people in your street who are interested in collating your records on a computer, using iRecord. Please see our factsheet on recording for more advice on what to do with records.