



WILD PATCH INFORMATION SHEET

Hibernacula & homes

Create your Wild Patch

Many invertebrates and amphibians are declining in numbers in the wider countryside. By providing hibernacula (places for hibernation), homes and nesting sites for them in the garden we can contribute to their conservation.

Log pile

Deadwood is home to many species including bugs and beetles that are crucial to the wider ecosystem within a garden. This habitat requires almost no effort to create! Leave fallen branches where they are or stack some together in a damp, shady corner to create your own log pile. If you find this pile unsightly you can grow ivy, clematis or ferns over it. These will provide further benefits for other wildlife.

Before creating a pile, first dig a hollow about 30–60cm deep to lay the first logs in. This will keep the bottom layer in contact with the soil. Keeping the pile moist but not soaked is key.

Algae, mosses and fungi are first to colonise. Unseen bacteria and a myriad of other microscopic life will follow along with insects, small reptiles and mammals. Birds, bats and hedgehogs might feed on the insects.

Dead hedge or brush pile



Similar to a wood pile, difficult-to-compost dead twigs or smaller branches can be piled in a heap or used to construct a 'dead hedge'. Partly supported by stakes, any woody material such as twigs, prunings, small branches, roots, etc can be laid in layers and will slowly decompose. This provides a range of habitats for invertebrates and small mammals.

DID YOU KNOW?
There are 4,000 species of beetle in Britain – many of them can be found in gardens.

Corrugated iron, slabs and rocks

It's not pretty – but a sheet of corrugated iron will make a great place for snakes, lizards and slow worms to sunbathe and shelter. Paint the top half black to absorb heat and put it in a sunny spot.

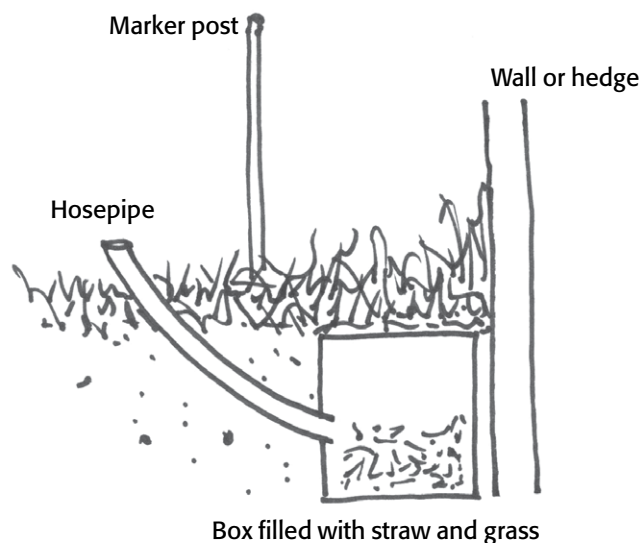
A pile of rocks or waste building material is an instant habitat for reptiles, invertebrates and ground-dwelling mammals. Positioned somewhere sunny it might attract lizards and snakes, or if it is near a pond it will be hibernation and shelter for frogs, toads and newts.

Any rocks or bricks can be used, but a variety of sizes is ideal to create plenty of cracks and crevices. Start by digging out a hollow up to a metre deep and then fill with rocks, bricks and stones.

On a smaller scale you can use paving slabs or boards in a damp corner for frogs, toads and newts. Scoop out a variety of shallow hollows and lay the slab or boards over the top.

Bumblebee box

The UK has around 25 species of bumblebee, six of which are common visitors to the garden. In late summer the young queen bumblebees will leave the colony and look for somewhere to hibernate, usually in an underground chamber, before starting a new colony in the spring. You can try providing a den for them by making a 100x100x200mm box with a 30mm hole near the bottom of one side. (An old flowerpot with drainage hole can also be used.) Put



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the box (or pot) in a hole in the ground in a north-facing spot near a fence, hedge or wall. Attach a piece of pipe through the ground to the hole in the box (or pot), and place bedding material such as straw or grass inside. Then cover the it all turves or stones, leaving the pipe open. An upright 10cm tall stick can act as a 'marking post' to help the bees find their way 'home'.

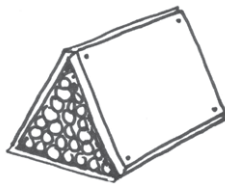
Mason bees box

Solitary mason bees will look for hollow stems in the spring in which to lay her eggs. They are extremely effective pollinators and are a welcome addition to garden wildlife.

Cut stems from hogweed or other hollow-stemmed plants and stack them in a framework made from wood or board. Hang or place the box in a sunny spot. The female mason bee will lay her egg in the stem together with some pollen, and then plug it with mud. The young bees will emerge the following year.

Wildlife hotel

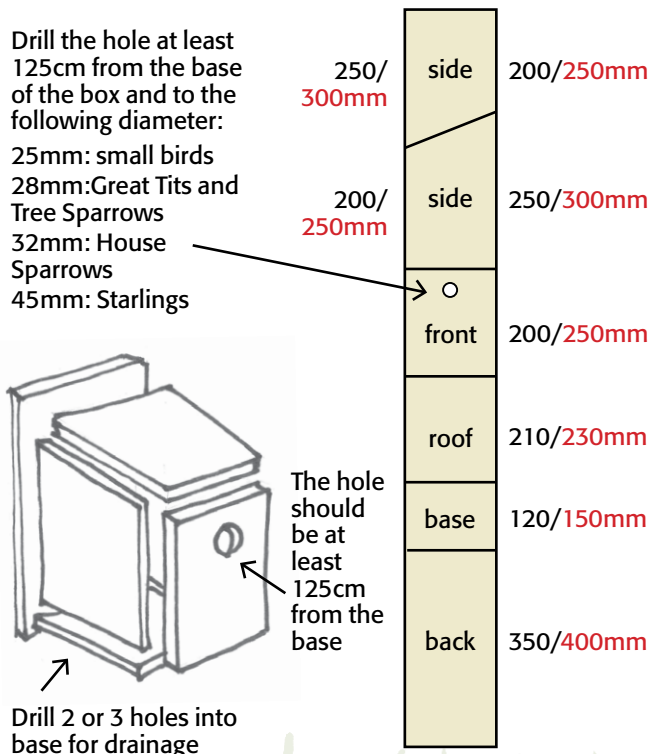
Using a variety of materials to create a luxury high-rise 'wildlife hotel' will attract a wide variety of small wildlife to the garden. Start with a firm base of bricks and then lay plywood or pallets on top to create 'floors'. Fill the gaps with a variety of animal friendly materials such as: straw, stones, roofing tiles, rolled up corrugated cardboard, logs with holes drilled in the end, pipes, sand, bamboo canes, hollow stems from plants like hogweed, twigs, wool, etc. Cover the top with roof tiles or board to keep it dry.



Bird Boxes

Bird boxes in the garden are of recognised help to bird populations and, of course, a source of pleasure. Nest boxes can be roosting as well as nesting sites. Recently the new-to-the-UK Tree Bumblebee has used bird boxes to house colonies.

Different birds use different nest sizes. A simple box can be made from a single sheet of 15mm thick untreated timber. Use the first measurement (in black) for a smaller box for tits and sparrows, and the second larger measurement (in red) for larger birds nesters such as starlings. A total length of 1330/1580mm and a width of 150/180mm is needed.



Fix the lid with a metal hinge at the back and a fastener at the front so that you can lift the lid and clean out the box in the autumn.

Some birds such as Robins, Spotted Flycatchers and Pied Wagtails prefer a more open slot than a hole. This can be achieved by sawing off a third of the top of the front panel before assembling.

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If you don't feel up to making a box yourself, a huge variety of boxes can be found at garden centres or online. The RSPB is a good place to start: see the 'further information' panel.

Siting the box depends on the type of species that will

use it. If the box is unsuccessful it's always worth experimenting with a slight move – sometimes only a few inches can make all the difference.

- House Sparrows and Starlings: high under eaves
- Wrens and Robins: below 2m, amongst vegetation
- Great Tits, Blue Tits and Coal Tits: above 2m on trees and walls

The box should be facing the north and east, away from strong sunlight and westerly winds. Tilting the box slightly forward will avoid rain driving into the hole. Some birds, such as sparrows, are colonial so site several boxes together.

The summer visiting House Martins are in a slow decline – possibly due to lack of nest sites on modern houses. You can buy House Martin boxes online, but you can also give them a helping hand by ensuring there is a supply of mud for nestbuilding nearby.

If you have trees in your garden it's possible that they are suitable for Kestrel or owl boxes. Information and suppliers for these can be found online (see further information panel).

Hedgehog home

Hedgehogs will readily hibernate in compost heaps, piles of leaves, dead hedges or log piles, but you can provide a home for them that is predator free. Use or make a 40 x 30 x 40 cm box (small plastic storage boxes are ideal). Make an entrance hole of 11 x 15 cm on one side of the box and another smaller hole on the opposite side near the top to take a piece of hose for ventilation. Insert the hose.

In a nutshell...

Creating homes for creatures in your garden will help increase the biodiversity of wildlife in your Wild Patch.

Put the box in a quiet corner of the garden, under a hedge, behind the shed or greenhouse, etc, with the entrance facing south. Cover with vegetation and branches and weigh down with slates or roof tiles. As part of their hibernation ritual the hedgehog will line the box itself so don't be tempted to fill it with any bedding.



Bats

Having compost heaps, ponds and piles of dead wood will ensure that there is a good supply of insects to attract bats to the garden. Bats are largely colonial and will nest and roost in crevices and roof spaces, but boxes can be bought online from the Bat Conservation Trust (see further information panel).

DID YOU KNOW?
As many as 50 Wrens have been found roosting together in a bird box during a cold snap.

Further information

Bat Conservation Trust www.bats.org.uk

British Hedgehog Preservation Society
www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org

Buglife www.buglife.org.uk

Bumblebee Conservation Trust
www.bumblebeeconservation.org

The Hawk and Owl Trust www.hawkandowl.org

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
www.rspb.org.uk

The Royal Horticultural Society www.rhs.ork.uk

The Wildlife Garden Project
www.wildlifegardenproject.com

The Wildlife Trusts www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk

Wild About Gardens www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk

Wildlife and wildlife gardening
www.naturalsurroundings

Contact us

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