

# Small Spaces



**Dorset**  
Wildlife Trust

**Wildlife-friendly gardening**



# MAKING THE MOST OF SMALL SPACES

Think you don't have enough space for plants? Think again! This leaflet offers tips on attracting wildlife to balconies, patios and window boxes. Most wildlife is remarkably mobile - provide the right conditions and it will find you.



Bee hotel  
© Jane Adams



© Abi Paine



Hedgehog hole in leaf pile  
© Joy Wallis



Patio pot  
© Joy Wallis



# TOP TIPS FOR TINY GARDENS

## 1 POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY PLANT POTS

Don't be put off by the size of your patio or balcony. There are many pollen and nectar-rich plants you can grow in a pot to attract wildlife, from bees to moths and butterflies. See our Pollinators leaflet for more information.

## 2 POND IN A BUCKET

All animals need water. Make sure you keep a shallow bowl of water for birds to bathe in and perhaps a deeper one containing water plants, such as hornwort. You'll be surprised how many creatures will arrive of their own accord.

## 3 HANGING BASKETS

In a small space, hanging baskets provide a wonderful display for you and another source of energy for flying insects such as butterflies and bees. Check out our list of alternative hanging baskets plants in this leaflet.

## 4 GO PEAT-FREE

Use peat-free compost in all your pots - the bogs and moorlands of Britain and Eastern Europe are suffering greatly due to the extraction of peat for compost. Remember the wider conservation impact while creating your own living garden. Or even better - make your own compost!

## 5 VARIETY OF LIFE

Provide as wide a variety of habitats as possible - a little shade, a sunny spot, some water. Lots of variety in a small space will attract a greater diversity of creatures for you to enjoy.

## 6 FENCES

Create small gaps in any fences and barriers around your garden so that frogs, toads, newts and hedgehogs can access all the goodies you provide. A hedgehog needs a territory the size of at least 20 typical gardens to roam in.

If untreated, fences provide a good site for pupating insects, for example butterflies and moths.



# SUITABLE PLANTS

## CLIMBING PLANTS

Climbers provide an important food supply and shelter for a host of birds and butterflies.

Grow plants up a trellis that is set 10cm from the wall to make a great space for nesting birds.

Ivy provides a wonderful wildlife habitat and it won't damage trees or walls, unless you have soft, old lime cement. Leave it to flower as this provides food for migrant butterflies and moths while the berries are an important food source in the winter.

## ALTERNATIVE HANGING BASKETS AND WINDOW BOXES

Try an alternative hanging basket full of herbs such as dill, parsley, thyme, sage, oregano, basil, chives, marjoram. Allow these herbs to flower so pollinators can benefit. Or create one full of fruit or vegetables such as strawberries, tumbling tomatoes, cucumbers, dwarf courgettes and edible nasturtiums. Or if you prefer flowering plants try bird's-foot trefoil, phacelia or geraniums.

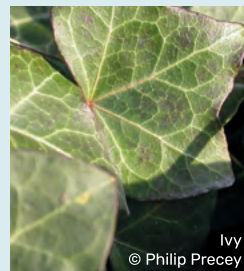


## SPRING BULBS

Layer different bulbs in a pot to create a fantastic spring flowering display. Daffodils, crocus, and grape hyacinth are all easy to grow, as are alliums but NEVER plant the invasive three-cornered garlic *Allium triquetrum*, which readily escapes into the wild. In a shadier spot you could try native bluebells, winter aconite or snake's head fritillary.

## TRAINED OR DWARF TREES

Many fruit trees can be trained to grow flush to your wall. Dwarf varieties can be grown in a pot with a little yearly maintenance. You can keep and store fruit in a cool place and use it for feeding the birds in the winter. Grow dwarf hebes or other miniature species in a pot.



## SHADY PATCH

Choose a range of native ferns, as well as traditional woodland species. The following will all thrive in shade:

- Snowdrop
- Herb robert
- Common violet
- Nettle-leaved bellflower
- Wild strawberry
- Native bluebell
- Bugle
- Columbine
- Foxglove
- Great woodrush
- Lily of the valley
- Primrose

# WATER

## POND IN A BUCKET

Fill a container with water - as big as you can fit into the area you have as a garden. Wide and shallow is better than deep and narrow.

Add a small selection of plants including one submerged plant such as curled pond weed or water milfoil. Don't overcrowd the pond and leave some clear water for creatures to use. Make sure there is a rock or shelf so that birds can bathe, and frogs and toads can get out.



Pond  
© Katie Wilkinson



Newt  
© Tim Howell



Frog  
© Ken Dolbear MBE



Goldfinch  
© Steve Davis

## BIRD BATHS

Provide sources of clean drinking water and bathing water. This is especially important in the winter when most other water sources will be frozen - birds need to drink every day, just like us.



Water butt  
© Errin Skingsley

## WATER BUTT

Catch the rainwater from your roof. Use it to water your plants and top up the miniature pond; it's much better than tap water for the creatures and plants that thrive in your garden. It is also better for the rest of the wildlife in the countryside as it uses less water.

# PROVIDING SHELTER

## BUG HOTELS

Bug hotels can be filled with many different materials including: pine cones, hollow stems, twigs, straw, leaves, old roofing tiles, bricks with holes. Place it in a cool, shady damp area to attract all sorts of creepy crawlies.



## BEE HOMES

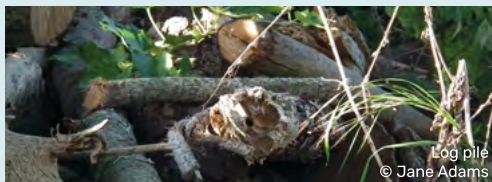
Bee homes should be made from wood.

Make a frame and fill with bamboo sticks or blocks of wood or logs. Drill holes at least 10cm depth and no more than 1cm diameter into the blocks/logs.

Attach the bee home securely in a sunny position – preferably next to some nectar rich plants.

## LOG OR STONE PILE

Leave a few logs with bark in a pile, partially burying some if possible - this is a favourite place for minibeasts to hibernate and, if you are in the east of the county, for the rare greater stag beetle.



## COMPOST

Compost your waste to become a more self-sufficient gardener and provide the plants in your mini-habitats with a sustainable supply of excellent nutrients.

The compost bin will also be an important mini-habitat itself. Keep it moist in the dry summer months and ensure a good mix of 'green' waste such as vegetable peelings, and 'brown' waste such as egg shells, egg boxes, shredded non-glossy paper and dead leaves.

## BIRD BOXES

Build boxes from unstained, untreated, unplanned, rough cut timber. 'Woodcrete' models are also available. There are many different nest box types to attract different birds - check out our website for more details. Position your bird boxes out of direct sun with the entrance opening roughly north-east, away from the prevailing wind, at a height of at least 2m. Walls are preferable to tree trunks if cats patrol your garden. Ensure that nest boxes or bird tables are at least 20m apart to avoid territorial disputes.

## FLAGSTONE HIBERNACULUM

Dig a 3 - 4cm deep corridor and chamber under a garden flagstone for hibernating frogs, toads and newts.



# FEEDING

## BIRD FEEDING

Birds have different feeding preferences depending on what species they are. Those with hard, broader beaks are mainly seed eaters e.g. finches; those with smaller, pointed beaks are mainly creepy-crawly eaters but will enjoy peanuts too e.g. tits and warblers. Some birds e.g. sparrows and blackbirds prefer foraging on lawns or patios where there is good visibility. Keep food 2m away from anywhere cats can hide.

If you don't have room for a traditional bird table, make one in the form of a shelf attached to a wall. You can hang nut and seed feeders from the side and place water on the surface. If you put it next to an upstairs window, you can get to it but cats can't.



## WHICH SORT OF FOOD?

For birds, try to provide both hard and soft food, e.g. cheese, cooked potato, porridge oats, fruit, melon seeds, raisins, stale cake, sultanas, tinned cat/dog food, unsalted peanuts, chopped bacon rind, currants, mealworms, nuts, suet, black sunflower seeds.

Avoid white bread, hydrogenated fats, salty food, desiccated coconut, as well as plastic mesh nets: birds can get their claws stuck in them, particularly when startled. Regularly clear away unused food to avoid rats and prevent the spread of diseases.

## HEDGEHOGS

A wildlife-friendly garden will be a great place for hedgehogs to forage, but you can supplement their diet with good quality dog or cat food or a proprietary hedgehog food.

- Don't feed milk as this will give them bad diarrhoea.
- Avoid mealworms or peanuts - the high phosphorus content of these 'treats' causes bone disease.
- Make a feeding station made from an upturned box with a 'hog sized hole cut in the side and baffles inside to prevent cats accessing the food.
- Make a 13cm diameter hole in your fence to help them travel safely.
- Don't forget to put out fresh water to drink too!



## DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

Our vision is to create a 'Wilder Dorset', rich in wildlife, valued and nurtured by everyone. By 2030, we want to see 30% of land and sea managed for the benefits of nature and we want to help more people take action for nature. A 'Wilder Dorset' will safeguard our natural world for future generations and enable people to live healthier and more fulfilling lives.

With the support of our 27,000 members, our volunteers, supporters, and partners, we champion wildlife and natural places on our 40 nature reserves and work to deliver nature's recovery throughout Dorset.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

[wildaboutgardens.org](http://wildaboutgardens.org)  
[rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk)  
[hedgehogstreet.org](http://hedgehogstreet.org)

## Our thanks to The Gardens Group for sponsoring this leaflet



located in Sherborne (Castle Gardens), Yeovil (Brimsmore Gardens) and Poundbury (Poundbury Gardens).

United by a commitment to green spaces and the wider community, The Gardens Group's team of experts includes

The Gardens Group is made up of three garden centres, each as unique as the plants within them,

indoor and outdoor plant enthusiasts, lepidopterists and wildlife warriors, all ready to inspire, educate and engage with gardeners of all ages and levels of expertise.

The garden centres are also home to three award-winning restaurants and a farm shop, built on people and place, as well as The Gardens Group's hugely popular and multi award-winning Christmas displays.

To find out more, go to [www.thegardensgroup.co.uk](http://www.thegardensgroup.co.uk).

## take ACTION #WilderDorset

There are lots of ways to encourage wildlife in your garden. Plant flowers to attract pollinators, make a hedgehog doorway in your fence or simply create different habitats such as hedges, flowering trees or long grass. Large or small, your garden will be a stepping stone, helping wildlife to travel from place to place, to breed, feed and shelter.



Make space for nature in your green space and apply for your wildlife-friendly plaque. Visit [dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/gardenscheme](http://dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/gardenscheme) to find out how to qualify.