

WAYS TO MAKE YOUR GARDEN WILDLIFE FRIENDLY

A handy guide on ways to make your garden wildlife friendly and turn it into an organic fine dining restaurant for a whole range of visitors, written by wildlife gardener Jane Krish.

RELAX! It's best not to be too tidy, but don't just let it go: manage your garden to suit the wildlife and soil in your neighbourhood.

BE PATIENT! Change happens slowly in nature.

NUMBER 1 PRIORITY - STOP USING ALL CHEMICALS such as slug pellets, lawn feed, rose spray, fertiliser - and that includes organic ones. If you have been using these, it may take a year or two for your garden to settle down, but you'll be saving money and helping bugs, insects, birds and even hedgehogs to thrive and enjoy the new restaurant you're opening for them.



Jane's wildlife garden

STOP WORRYING ABOUT SLUGS AND SNAILS - untainted by chemicals, small mammals, birds, frogs, toads and snail hunting beetles can enjoy them safely. To be sure of success aim to grow plants that they don't want to eat. In my garden, I find they tend to leave alone hellebores, iris, hardy geraniums, rambling roses, honeysuckles (grown for the moths), clematis, alliums, lavender, rosemary, comfrey and lots more, including wild flowers like garlic mustard which provides food for orange-tip butterfly caterpillars.

And, **DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE APHIDS** on your roses, leave them for the birds to enjoy – blue tits and great tits love them, not to mention hoverflies, lacewings and ladybirds.



Bumblebee on a chive flower

It's great to **PROVIDE A VARIETY OF FOOD** for as much of the year as possible for both birds and pollinators. [Pollinators include bees, hoverflies, moths, butterflies and beetles.] Grow shrubs such as cotoneaster, brilliant for attracting bumblebees, honey and solitary bees, from late spring into summer, with lovely red berries for birds in winter. Grow early-flowering plants like low growing comfrey, pulmonaria (lungwort), mahonia (juicy berries after flowering), hellebore and *Clematis armandii*. Leave seed heads standing in autumn. Ivy not only flowers late, which is great for pollinators, it also offers a safe haven for insects, amphibians and small birds during the cold weather and has berries around the turn of the year. Our back fence is a fantastic green screen of ivy.

Hardy geraniums are a brilliant range of plants with great variety of flower shapes to suit different pollinators which come out at different times over the summer. They also provide fantastic ground cover for frogs, newts, small mammals, bugs and insects. Plus they keep the weeds down. As a result, I only rarely need to do weeding. If the hardy geraniums get too large you can split them up and pot them up for friends. When they finish flowering, chop them right down to the ground and their pretty foliage will return quite quickly so they can continue to be great ground cover. Some might even flower again.



Habitat pile

MINI HOMES IN HABITAT PILES - Why not recycle garden waste into mini habitat piles? For instance, tuck logs, pruned material from shrubs, dead leaves and so on under shrubs, against a wall or into an undisturbed corner and create a secret habitat for fungi, bugs and insects which become food for birds, frogs, toads and newts. These damp places can also provide hibernation homes for frogs, toads and newts.

YOUR GRASS – Even if you have a young family who need space to play, consider allowing some of it to provide a variety of habitats. Mine is now partly meadow with a mixture of cut grass, long grass and perennial wild flowers, including cowslip, violet, primrose, self-heal, white and red clover, bird's-foot trefoil, ox-eye daisy, yellow (or hay) rattle and plantain which

grow back every year. If you live in the Bristol area you can buy plug plants from Avon Wildlife Trust's Grow Wilder <https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/explore/grow-wilder> or buy seed from

<https://www.organiccatalogue.com/seeds/featured-flower-seeds/wild-flower-seeds/>

PROVIDING WATER

A **pond** is a marvellous way of increasing the number of species in your garden. Our pond provides endless fascination with its frogs, newts, damselflies and all sorts of mini species which simply arrived with no introductions. The plants also provide variety. We've had it for 25 years and it's taken time to evolve - every year is different in part because of the weather.

We also have a very **small pond**, a recycled baby bath with pond liner, which different generations of frogs enjoy over the summer. If you install one of these then make sure you create a way out for them such as some stones up to the rim.



Common frogs enjoying the pond

Bird bath: Blackbirds, sparrows and other small birds love to bathe here and it provides water for other visitors too such as fox, hedgehog and our cat!

Water butts: These are a great way to save rainwater for periods of drought, which are becoming more frequent with climate change. If you have a pond, aim to top it up with rainwater, not tapwater.

BIRD FOOD – attract birds to your garden with bird food and once they're used to visiting, they'll hunt out other juicy delights you have on offer in the way of chemical free berries, seeds, bugs, worms and insects.



Compost daleks and habitat pile

FEED THE SOIL – if you have space and don't already have a compost bin, it's really worth it. We have two compost daleks which sit directly on the soil, as you need worms to break it all down. I fill one up with vegetable peelings, grass, weeds (but not bindweed or ground elder), and 'brown' contents such as egg boxes, loo roll, shredded paper - in detail here:

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/how-do-i-make-my-compost>

When it's full I let it be, usually for about a year, and start filling the other one. You'll know it's ready when the contents are all crumbly and odourless and you can spread it around in early spring as food for your soil and plants. If you need to buy compost, go for organic and peat free. Don't put any kind of compost on your grass if you're growing wildflowers in it as they only thrive on poor soil.

YOU HAVE A VERY SMALL OUTSIDE SPACE

Why not try growing wildflowers in pots to suit your space and wait for the pollinators to find them?

Useful website: <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk>

TO FIND OUT MORE watch Jane's film 'Welcoming Wildlife to Suburban Gardens', which will be aired on Saturday 5th June 1pm, as part of the Festival of Nature 2021 programme: www.festivalofnature.org.uk



Common blue butterfly

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