

HOW TO HAVE A WILDLIFE-LOVING GARDEN – NOTES FOLLOWING GREENING ARUNDEL EVENT

- Our gardens are becoming the last refuge for wildlife
- Wildlife gardening is not just about the plants and features you have, it's also about mindset and management
- Wildlife needs water, food, shelter and somewhere to breed. We can create a year-round, nurturing, vibrant place which provides them with that.
- Focus on insects and from that, many other animals will be able to succeed. Your garden could host thousands of species of insects if you work on it – it's fascinating!
- It's not about an instant garden makeover, it's a slow evolving process

WHAT ARE WILDLIFE GARDENS LIKE?

Not necessarily super-wild and sprawling. They can be highly ornamental and ordered as long as they have these characteristics:

High plant diversity – this will mean that there is food for both the larvae of insects and their ultimate incarnation eg orange tip butterfly larvae like eating Hedge Garlic. Migrant hummingbird hawk moths love drinking nectar from Red Valerian. It will also mean you always have something in flower for as long as possible across the year. MIND THE GAP! This is VERY important. A combination of vegetables, flowers and herbs is a good way to achieve this

Tolerance for change and acceptance of useful plants than float in (that you didn't plant) for example a cluster of dandelions may have emerged. Make them into a neat circle and give the bees an early source of nectar.

Native and non- native species are just as good if they are known to be good for pollinators. Who cares what their country of origin is! Just have more from Britain and Northern hemisphere than the Southern hemisphere. You can observe for yourself, which ones are preferred and plant more of those.

Structural diversity – different heights and widths of trees, hedges, shrubs and herbaceous plants. Different birds have different preferences in terms of how high/low, tight or loosely structured they need a nesting site to be, for example Yellowhammers prefer a tightly cut, dense hedge, other species like robins will go for looser hedges.

FIRST DO NO HARM

Think where you tread – maybe keep just to paths or stepping stones as much as possible to leave areas of your garden untrampled.

Keep an area totally undisturbed for a year if you can eg a slow compost heap, a pile of leaves and/or logs. This might be good for slow worms, snakes and hedgehogs not to mention the insects some of these animals rely on.

No chemicals – insecticides, herbicides, fungicides all have extreme effects on ecosystems, only just beginning to be properly researched.

Keep external inputs natural/organic – organic, peat free compost; seaweed feed only; Grazers is an option for spraying on leaves of plants you don't want eaten by rabbits, pigeons etc

Don't cut hedges or trees between end of February and August. Always check for nests if you must do a light trim.

Don't work/garden in low light – it is really hard to see animals you might be harming

Try No-Dig somewhere to protect your soil structure and the myriad creatures in it. Perhaps make one of your borders bigger and lose a bit of lawn. Cardboard down, mulch on top leave it for a year or so or plant into the mulch if its compost and deep enough.

Careful with the tools- especially powered tools. Strimmers are vicious things and cause terrible injuries or death to hiding/sleeping animals especially hedgehogs and slow worms. Preferably use shears. Either way check an area thoroughly before using.

Make ponds safer- with shallow areas and escape ramps for hedgehogs.

Remove hazards to animals– broken glass, bits of netting/chicken wire, paper cups (that can trap animals). Consider replacing wire fences with a hedge or a more natural type of fence like hazel or chestnut hurdles.

Feed Birds with care – natural food sources are always preferable but using bird feeders is very rewarding. Paramount is weekly cleaning of feeders, weekly rotation of feeders around the garden and daily cleaning and air drying of bird baths – this will minimise the transfers of terrible diseases like Trichomonosis

Minimise Pet Damage – Cats -preferably keep them in at night – wide, colourful bibs or bells may only have a minor effect. Dogs- try to make somewhere in your garden that your dog can't get to!!

SECOND – GET THE BASICS RIGHT

Water, water, water – a well-designed and constructed wildlife pond is best (no fish!). If you don't do anything else provide a bird bath and a bee/insect watering station and keep replenishing.

Right plants, from the right place – the right species, raised organically, and NOT traditional bedding plants like busy lizzies, pelargoniums, begonia as they have NO VALUE to pollinators.

Have a hedge or a thickets somewhere even if small - a mixed blackthorn and hawthorn thicket is beautiful, provides a succession of flowers from February/March to May then fruit from summer through into winter. Easy to manage, almost impossible to kill!

If you have a lawn turn all or some of it into a wildflower meadow – the cheap, quick way is to leave it long and see what comes through. The expensive quick way is using plug plants, the slower way is by scarifying and seeding late summer or into autumn.

Paths, paths, paths – through your lawn -so you have different heights of grass and flowers in it. Stepping stones or gravel trails to minimise treading on soil – these will be habitats too.

Fence liberation- if you can't remove one, make it into a habitat – grow up a climber like honeysuckle or an evergreen like clematis armandii if your fence is robust and high. Make it a point of access into your neighbours gardens for hedgehogs with a Hog Highway.

Leave the leaves - on your borders during winter – collect them carefully in Spring

Let ivy grow long enough to flower- you will feed the bees in late autumn into winter plus provide berries for birds

Moss has a value – as food and shelter for mini beasts - leave some in a section of lawn. Leave it to grow on log piles, stones etc

FINALLY

Remember the State of Nature is perilous - we are the last hope for wildlife these days.

Start to observe what is happening in your garden – who lives there too?. Preferably measure and report it through the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (<https://ukpoms.org.uk/>). Contact greenteam.arundel@gmail.com to take part in training sessions from 10am on 26th or 29th May.

A new, vibrant and at times alien-seeming world will be unlocked once you consciously share your space with other species. The entertainment is endless.

MORE INFO

1. Wildlife Gardening Forum – science- based research and advice – www.wlgf.org. Subscribe to their interesting newsletter
2. Practical, professional wild life gardeners on Twitter:
@_JoelAshton
@WildYourGarden
3. In-depth but accessible books:
Sussex University’s Professor Dave Goulson, a top entomologist has written several books including The Garden Jungle and is on Twitter @DaveGoulson
The Biodiversity Gardener- Paul Sterry. A hardback combining honest, wry philosophy and details about species and compatible plants.
4. Organic Nurseries
Few and far between, for now:
Best, most specialised on-line source of the best pollinator pants grown in the best way is Rosybee www.rosybee.com @rosybeeplants

Locally, Culberry Nursery grows their own herbs and vegetables organically. I can’t say the same for many of the flowers they sell which have clearly been bought in, though some they rear themselves, need to ask. Dappers Lane, Angmering BN16 4EW. 01903 784107. Worth a to experience a nursery “like they used to be” and not full of irrelevant tat!

5. Organic plant protection repellent treatment – Grazers – www.grazers.co.uk. Caveat- it’s unclear how many safety tests have been re effects on wildlife or plants.