



**Ulster  
Wildlife**

Let  
nature  
in 



# Starter Pack

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**Share  
Your  
Garden!**

# Do what you can at home to Help Nature Recover



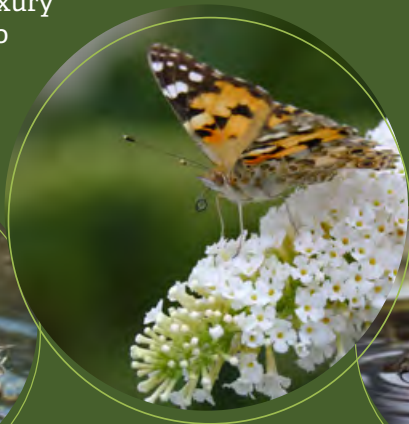
**Our nature is suffering. 1 in 10 species in Northern Ireland are at risk of extinction and we are losing more of our natural world every day.**

But we can still turn things around before it's too late – nature is capable of extraordinary recovery, if we give it the space and care it needs. We need to use every single space to help wildlife, to create a wild network of green corridors and wild spaces – and your garden could be the crucial piece of the jigsaw!

Our connection to nature is much more important than we may think; nature is not a luxury but is in fact essential to our humanity and health.

We need wildlife and wild places to thrive. By creating more space for nature, we can create a better world for everyone.

Ulster Wildlife wants to help and encourage people to get out into their garden to create a shared nature-friendly haven for them, their families and for local wildlife. We want to let nature in! Whatever kind of garden you have, you can make space for nature. A garden for wildlife doesn't have to be a scruffy jungle, it can be a mosaic of mini wildlife habitats that come together to create a space for all.



The three main things wildlife needs are **FOOD, WATER** and **SHELTER**. These are a great place to start when creating a wildlife-friendly garden.

## Food

We all need food and your garden can provide it for a whole host of wildlife.

Trees and shrubs offer fruits and seeds for birds, whilst wildflowers provide nectar and pollen for butterflies, moths and bees. Areas of long grass and deadwood provide a hunting ground for mammals and insects. In the winter when it is harder for wildlife to find food, you can help by feeding the birds or leaving out hedgehog food.



## Shelter

Creating a space for wildlife to feel safe and secure is a great way to encourage them to take up residence in your garden. You can also give wildlife a place to live and raise their young. There are many ways you can provide shelter: leave a wood or leaf pile for insects, hedgehogs and frogs; provide boxes for birds, bats and hedgehogs; let hedges and edges grow a little wilder; create a bumblebee nest; provide a bee hotel or create a bee bank.



## Water

A water source of any size is essential for wildlife.

Ponds are a great addition to your garden and offer birds, animals and insects a place to drink and bathe throughout the year. Birdbaths can provide water for wildlife during periods of hot weather. Putting a low dish of water with stones in the bottom can provide a safe place for bees to drink. You can get creative by using old pots, dishes or a sink! Remember – all water sources in your garden should be wildlife safe, but also safe for you and your family.



# Helping Garden Birds

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## Share Your Garden

Over the last 50 years, we have lost millions of our garden birds, with many once-common species still in decline. There are many factors contributing to this loss, including changes to land use, use of pesticides, loss of insects and increasing urban development.

With the current impacts of climate change, even more pressure is being put upon our garden birds.



The good news is your garden can help. By creating shelter, providing nesting spaces, and setting out food and water, you can help our struggling birds recover.



## Birds to look for in your garden:

- **Blackbird** – Males are black, but females are brown, both have a yellow beak.
- **Coal Tit** – These tiny birds cache food to help them survive the winter.
- **Robin** – They used to follow wild boar as they turned over soil, now they follow gardeners!
- **Blue Tit** – Chicks can eat 100 caterpillars a day!
- **Song Thrush** – Can be seen smashing open snail shells on rocks.
- **Goldfinch** – Beautiful birds that are prolific seed eaters.





# How you can Let Nature In



## Shelter and natural food

Trees and hedgerows provide lots of natural food and shelter for our birds. Many birds nest in tree branches and holes, while others prefer the cover of hedgerows or ivy.



Different plants provide different food sources that sustain our birds throughout the seasons. Fresh buds and catkins are great for birds in the springtime, and native plants are full of insects in the summer. Fruit-bearing trees such as cherry and hawthorn are important in the autumn, while ivy and holly provide food and shelter from the cold during snowy spells.

## Water and bathing

All birds need water. Birdbaths are perfect as they provide ample drinking water and space for birds to bathe. Ponds are also great, or if you don't have the space, a small open bowl will do the trick.



## Feeding garden birds

Feeding our garden birds can help them out when food is scarce. It's

important to use a variety of foods as different species have different needs: nuts, seeds and suet are all great food sources, and even leftovers such as fruit or cooked potatoes!



During late spring and summer, it is important to reduce the amount of food you leave out for the birds, as young birds are learning to find food for themselves and it's important they are not wholly dependent on the food we provide. Make sure to clean your feeders regularly.

## Nesting

Putting up nest boxes is a great way to encourage birds to breed in your garden. Tit boxes need to be high up, between 2m and 4m. Ensure that access to the nesting hole is unobscured. Thrush boxes need to be lower, under 2m and placed amongst thick cover, behind a hedge or climbing ivy. Don't be tempted to peep inside during spring and summer as this could disturb the nestlings. But do clean them out each winter.

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Blue Tit © Geoff Campbell; Goldfinch © Neil Aldridge

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# Helpful Hedgerows

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Why do we need hedges?

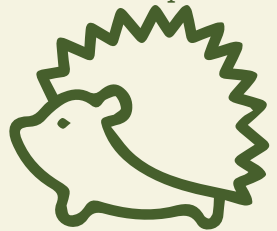
Hedges are often used to create boundaries in our gardens, but did you know they can also be one of the most valuable wildlife habitats?

**A healthy hedgerow will have lots of food for insects, birds and small mammals, and will also produce flowers which are great for bees and other pollinators.**

Thick hedgerows provide vital shelter for animals – small mammals like hedgehogs will forage for insects under the cover of a hedgerow and many garden birds nest in them.



Hedgerows also act as a 'highway' for all these different creatures, enabling them to travel across the landscape and between gardens. Joined-up hedgerows are a brilliant way to connect wildlife-friendly spaces, giving nature more space to grow and roam.



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# How you can Let Nature In



## Planting a new nature hedge

Healthy hedgerows take several years to mature, so the sooner you can start planting, the better! The best hedgerows are made up of different species rather than a single plant species, as different plants host specific insects and produce a variety of fruits, seeds or nuts.

Here are some suggestions for which species to use for a new hedge:

### Hedge Species:

- Hawthorn
- Blackthorn
- Hazel
- Guelder Rose
- Holly
- Spindle

### Garden Trees for hedges:

- Cherry
- Rowan
- Crab apple

Hedgerow maintenance and planting should be carried out in the autumn and winter. When planting a new hedgerow, place the plants/trees 30 cm apart. Make sure the grass is kept clear at the base and use tree guards to protect young trees from damage.



After one year of growth, trim back new growth by half. This will encourage the plant to grow outwards and not straight up. Over the first 5 years of growth, prune and control the shape of the hedge.

## Improving an existing hedge for wildlife

Many non-native plant species commonly used for hedging, such as leylandii and laurel, are very poor for wildlife. However if you do have one of these hedges you could try planting shade-tolerant native species in amongst them to improve them.

If you're lucky enough to have an established native hedge already, then trim it back every two years into an "A" shape. This will help thicken your hedge, ensure there's lots of cover for wildlife at its base and help it produce lots of flowers. Remember, it's illegal to damage bird nests so only trim your hedge outside of the nesting season. Delaying hedge cutting to late winter will allow wildlife to feed on the berries and nuts throughout the leanest period of the year, making February the best time to trim hedgerows.

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Hedgerow © Ross Hoddinott /2020VISION; Blackcap © Janet Packham

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# Helping Hedgehogs

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## Share Your Garden

Hedgehogs are one of our favourite and most iconic mammals. They're also great to have around the garden as they feast on garden 'pests' like slugs and snails. Hedgehogs have between 5000 - 7000 spines on their body and, although rarely spotted due to their nocturnal habits, their prickly spines and snuffling snout are familiar to almost everyone.

**Hedgehogs are disappearing across Europe and we think it's a similar situation here. We have all noticed how rarely we see them these days.**



And sadly, for a lot of us, the only time we'll ever see a hedgehog is on the road following a collision with traffic.

Ulster Wildlife has been working on finding out how our hedgehogs are faring locally, and how we can help them to recover. Our gardens are a great place to start – you could be a hedgehog hero!

## Threats

- A huge decline in insects means hedgehogs have less to eat.
- Hedgehogs have lost safe places to nest and hibernate.
- Many hedgehogs are killed every year on our roads.
- Hedgehogs are poisoned from consuming slug pellets and pesticides.
- Hedgehogs' natural hibernation cycle is being disrupted due to climate change.



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# How you can Let Nature In



## Stop using pesticides and slug pellets.

Slugs are hedgehogs' favourite food and if you're lucky enough that a hedgehog makes their home in your garden, you'll have natural pest control for your plants.



## Ensure there are places for hedgehogs to forage for their food.

- Thick hedgerows are great for a whole host of wildlife, especially the bugs that hedgehogs feed on.
- Leave one or two areas of longer grass – again great for bugs.
- A pile of logs or dead wood in a corner provides more places for beetles, slugs and bugs that hedgehogs dine on.



## In the winter, hedgehogs need safe places to hibernate.

Leaf piles are great in a quiet corner of the garden, as are 'Hedgehog Houses' or boxes. Please don't be tempted to peek inside – leave residents undisturbed during hibernation.

## Create 'Garden Highways' for hedgehogs so they have safe routes to roam.



Cut a small hole at the bottom of fences and hedgerows to allow hedgehogs to move from garden to garden.

## Report any sightings of hedgehogs in your garden.

Sightings of hedgehogs provide important information that gives us a clearer picture of how they are doing. Submit your hedgehog sightings on our website and you'll be helping to protect them.

## Feed your hedgehogs.

Providing food is a great way to see our hedgehogs, but remember natural food is always best! You can supplement your hedgehogs' diet in times of need, for example, in spring after hibernation and during prolonged dry or rainy periods. Use cat, dog or hedgehog food that has a high protein content. You should always provide fresh water, but never milk, as hedgehogs are lactose intolerant.



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# Mini Meadows

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## Share Your Garden

If you're keen to add colour and attract wildlife to your garden, a wildflower mini-meadow is the perfect place to start! A wildflower meadow is a type of grassland, which is rich in flowers. A healthy traditional meadow can be teeming with over 100 species of wildflower all providing a vital food source and shelter for bees, birds, hedgehogs and other wildlife.

**Native wildflowers are vital for insects in their early life stages and are nectar-rich for butterflies and other pollinators.**

Sadly, we have lost a staggering 97% of our wildflower meadows and recent studies indicate that insects have declined by up to 75% in the last 30 years!

If each of our gardens had a mini meadow, it would do wonders for insects and wildflowers, creating a network of mini-jungles across the landscape for plants and animals to thrive. Become the bees' best friend and give it a go!

There are two main groups of wildflowers - annuals and perennials. Annual plants only live for a year while perennials can grow back year after year.



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# How you can Let Nature In



## How to Create a Mini Meadow

Select a small area of your garden that is open, has grass and gets lots of sunshine. From there, there are two main ways to make a mini meadow.

The easiest way is to DO NOTHING! Don't mow, let it grow! By not cutting the grass, you allow the wildflowers that are in the natural seed bank to begin to sprout. Most of these wildflowers will be perennials, meaning they will need two growing seasons before they flower, however dense grasses will provide lots of food and shelter for animals in the meantime. To maintain your meadow, cut in the autumn/winter and remove the cuttings – this helps keep grasses from dominating over the wildflowers in future years. An additional second cut in early March can also help encourage wildflower growth.



The more labour intensive method is to reseed an area with wildflower seeds. Strip the grass or scratch back the top soil to make some bare ground. Seed with a native wildflower mix.

Non-native wildflowers can be useful for wildlife, however native plants are crucial for pollinators to lay their eggs and provide food for their young. Using a mix of native wildflower species will give you colour in your mini meadow throughout the year. Again, cut your meadow in the autumn/winter and remove the cuttings to make sure the perennial flowers come back next spring.

## Native Wildflowers to look out for:

- Ox-eye Daisy (pictured)
- Red Clover
- Bush Vetch
- Buttercups
- Selfheal
- Dandelions
- Common spotted-orchid



## Where to purchase Wildflower Seeds.

Local is always best. Many seed mixes that you can buy in supermarkets, garden centres and bargain stores are not native to here, so it's better to buy local from places like EcoSeeds and True Harvest Seeds.

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Devil's bit scabious © Andrew Davis; Yellow rattle © Lee Schofield;  
Six-spot burnet © Guy Edwardes/2020 VISION; Ox eye daisy © Richard Burkmarr

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# Peat Free Compost

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## Share Your Garden

Using peat-free compost is one of the easiest ways to protect one of Northern Ireland's most important and sensitive habitats. Whether you buy peat-free compost, or try making your own, by going peat-free you can make a difference for wildlife.

**Peat has been used in compost for decades as it is rich in nutrients and very absorbent. However, harvesting peat has a devastating effect on our peatland habitats.**

Peatlands prevent flooding by acting like sponges to soak up rainwater, host a plethora of unique plants and animals, and very importantly, they also lock in carbon from the atmosphere. The world's peatlands make up only 3% of its surface, but they store more carbon than all the world's

forests combined, and the island of Ireland has nearly 10% of the world's peatlands. This makes them a powerful tool to combat climate change. Going peat-free protects one of our most precious ecosystems and helps to protect our planet.

Peat-free compost is now being sold in all good garden centres. Peat-free compost often requires more frequent watering, but most peat-free composts are similarly rich in nutrients.



# How you can Let Nature In



## Go peat-free

When buying compost please go for the peat-free option! Alternatively, why not try making your own compost? Most of our garden and food waste can be composted. Nutrient-rich compost is a valuable resource, and all you need is space and time!



Compost heaps are also a great home for wildlife; heaving with insects that provide food for birds, frogs and hedgehogs.

### How to make your own compost:

1. Select the location for your compost pile, somewhere with grass or soil, so that insects can access it.
2. Scrape the top layer off the soil and place down coarse woodchip; this will help some air circulate. You can contain your heap by nailing together wooden pallets or alternatively buying a bin from a garden centre.
3. Layer in your compost, 50% 'green waste' and 50% 'brown waste'.

'Green waste' is damp organic material; grass cuttings, raw fruit and vegetable waste, old flowers. You can even put in teabags and eggshells.

'Brown waste' is drier organic material, leaves, twigs, wood shavings, prunings. You can even use toilet roll tubes and egg boxes.

**Do not add:** Meat, cooked leftovers, dairy products, bread, cat/dog faeces, or barbeque or coal ashes.

Then just wait!  
You can speed the process up by covering your compost to keep the heat in and retain moisture. You can also mix your compost to aid the process. Normally it will take 6 – 12 months to make a batch of compost. Then you will have a wonderful resource for bedding and pot plants that protects our environment and helps our wildlife too.



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Compost © Lauren Heather; Carrot © Tom Marshall; Elephant hawk moth © Tom Marshall

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# Planting for Pollinators

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## What is a pollinator?

Pollinators are an amazing and varied group of creatures that include bees, flies, beetles, butterflies, wasps and moths. They are incredibly important as when these animals are foraging for nectar on our flowers, hedges and trees, they carry out the vital process of pollination.

**Pollination occurs when these creatures travel from plant to plant transferring the pollen on their bodies. This enables fertilisation and the plants to reproduce.**

Without this essential and free service provided by pollinators, very little would grow, including our food. Small or large, spotty or stripy, they all have one thing in common: they need our help as much as we need theirs.

Along with other insects, our pollinators are in huge decline locally and globally.

## Why do they need our help?

Pollinators are facing an uncertain future due to loss of areas to feed and shelter and an increase in pesticide use. Just like all species on the planet, our native pollinators require **shelter**, **food** and a **water** source.

Our gardens can offer shelter from harsh weather, an area for nesting, or a food source from the flowers and berries. Your garden could be that crucial piece of the jigsaw that allows a tired and hungry bumblebee to fill up on nectar before heading on to its next pit stop.

# How you can Let Nature In



## See what you've already got

Native flowers are best for our native insects and you'll be surprised what is hiding in the seed bank in your garden soil. Give natural plants room to grow and see what appears!

## Planting for pollinators

Whether it is a mini-meadow or a window box there are many ways to plant for pollinators. A top tip when choosing what to plant is seeing what the bees are feeding on in the garden centre!



Try swapping out the usual window box and container plants for something more wildlife-friendly – so instead of petunias and busy lizzies, think lavender and snapdragons.

## Create a herb garden or window box

Herbs are great for pollinators. Insects love plants like chives, rosemary, marjoram and thyme, and you can use them in your kitchen too.



## Provide water

Insects need to drink too! A very shallow dish of water full of pebbles for insects to perch on is perfect, especially in periods of hot and dry weather.

## Create wildlife corridors

Think about how mini-habitats link up so that wildlife can travel safely between them. Connect spaces using flower borders, hedges, grass, or wood or rock piles.

## Provide nectar all year

Think about having a nectar source available in spring, summer, autumn and winter so that pollinators always have a source of food.



## Planting for moths

Planting night scented flowers, such as honeysuckle and ivy, is a great way to help these secretive pollinators!

## Think about the lifecycle

Our insects have different life stages and they each need different things – for example, caterpillars feed on different food sources than butterflies. Patches of nettles are great for caterpillars and other insects.

## Avoid pesticides!

Chemicals are not a friend to our insects; avoid them where possible!



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Orange tip butterfly © Ross Hoddinott/2020 VISION; Bumblebee © Linda Thompson

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# Homes for Wildlife

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Why do we need to provide homes for nature?

Our local wildlife is in trouble and one of the main reasons is the lack of safe places for animals and birds to nest, rest, shelter or hibernate. Homes for wildlife come in a variety of shapes and sizes and there are many ways you can provide a natural or artificial wildlife home in your garden.

## Natural Wildlife Shelters

- Reduce your time using the mower by leaving a corner or a larger area of your lawn to grow longer. This creates a home for all sorts of insects, as well as the birds and animals that feed on them.
- Hedges and trees offer roosting and nesting opportunities for birds and animals.
- Ponds provide a great home for frogs, newts and aquatic insects.
- Log piles, leaf piles and a compost heap can provide a home for

hedgehogs as well as a place for insects such as beetles and worms. Frogs love spending the winter in these damp areas!

- Areas covered with ivy provide excellent shelter for birds and bats.
- Leaving an area of bare earth can provide an ideal habitat for solitary bees – look out for them in the springtime creating little tunnels in the soil to nest in.



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# How you can Let Nature In



## Artificial Wildlife Homes

You can find artificial nature boxes in supermarkets, garden centres and bargain stores. Some may be fine for wildlife but others are really more for decoration. Wildlife can be picky and you may be better purchasing from a natural history website or store.

### Bird boxes

Different nest boxes cater for different species. The most common types you can buy or make are enclosed boxes with an entrance hole. The size of the hole will dictate what species of bird it will attract – for example, 25mm suits blue tits but 32mm suits house sparrows and great tits.



Place nest boxes out of the way of strong sun, wind and rain. Make sure the entrance is visible and there is a clear path for the birds.

### Bat boxes

Bat boxes can give bats a safe place to rest during the day. There are many designs available, from wooden boxes to bat bricks – different bat species need different types of boxes.



Place them as high as possible on a building or a tree, ideally where bats are known to forage. Make sure they are away from artificial light sources.

### Homes for hedgehogs

An artificial wooden hedgehog box can provide a safe place for hedgehogs to breed and hibernate.

Make sure the entrance is secure to prevent predators getting in.

### Bee hotel

Bee hotels provide a safe place for some of our solitary bees to nest, including species such as leafcutter and mason bees.

They are made of a wooden frame filled with lengths of bamboo. Different diameters of bamboo will suit different species.

Place the bee hotel in a sunny spot close to nectar sources.



### Bumblebee nest

Bumblebees nest underground in old mice holes or in areas of dry grass. You can create an artificial nest to give them a helping hand.

Place a clay pot in a dry and sunny spot so that the drainage hole is facing up. Add some bedding such as dry grass inside and submerge the rest of the pot in soil. Attach a length of hosepipe to the drainage hole so the bees can get in and out.

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Leafcutter bee © Vaughn Matthews; Bird box © Ross Hoddinott/2020 VISION

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# Planting for Wildlife

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## Share Your Garden

Native plants are fantastic for wildlife – did you know that a mature oak tree can support 2,300 different species of plants, fungi and animals? Bumblebees can visit 1,500 flowers a day, so one of the best ways to help them is to provide the plants they need. A single Scabious plant can make 2,000 seeds!

**Nature is in crisis and we can all do little things in our gardens to help. One of the best ways to do this is to plant native plants, as much of our wildlife relies on native plants to survive.**

Many of our most loved insects need different plants at different life stages: for example, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral butterflies feed on nectar on a wide range of flowering plants, however their caterpillars eat nettle leaves! The caterpillars are then vital food for many of our garden birds.

To support our wildlife we need to cater for their changing needs through their life cycles and across the seasons.

Native plants are best, but many non-native garden plants are also useful for wildlife. Just remember to only use them in your garden as they can negatively affect the wider environment.



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# How you can Let Nature In



## Bedding and Pot Plants:

*Heather* and *Primrose* flowers are great for pollinators early in the springtime. Lots of insects also rely on heather as a foodplant for caterpillars.

*Bugle* and *Ragged Robin* are native wildflowers that are naturally found in damp grasslands, but many garden varieties do well in flowerbeds.

*Honesty* and *Nasturtium* leaves are great for white butterfly caterpillars, and their flowers are brilliant for bumblebees.

Hawk moths, including the Hummingbird Hawk moth use their long proboscis to reach nectar at the base of the long flowers of *Red Valerian* and *Nicotiana* plants.

Herbs like *Mint* and *Thyme* are great for pollinating insects and can be used in the kitchen too!

*Sea Holly* and *Scabious* species provide colour and nectar for insects in a flowerbed in the late summer, even into early autumn.

## Grow a Wild Patch

The easiest thing to do for wildlife is to leave around a meter squared wild patch in your garden to grow wild! Allow grasses to grow tall, nettles to

come through, even wildflowers from the seed bank may appear, making a brilliant refuge and food source for insects throughout the summer, and a hibernation spot through the winter. Cut back in spring once the weather warms, to give hibernating insects the chance to wake up. You can then carry out very little maintenance.

## Plant Small Trees

Native trees provide food and shelter for wildlife and can host hundreds of different species of animals. They produce the oxygen that all animals breathe and are an important ally in the battle against climate change, as they remove carbon dioxide from the air and store the carbon in their trunks, branches, leaves and roots.

Trees come in all shapes and sizes and you don't need a big garden to plant a tree; some can even be grown in pots! Native trees like *Cherry*, *Rowan* and *Crab Apple* produce fruit enjoyed by birds and insects alike. *Hazel* and *Willow* are great for caterpillars and other insects, as long as they are pruned regularly to stop them getting too big.

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Hummingbird hawk moth on devil's bit scabious © Vaughn Matthews; Ragged robin © Paul Lane

# Wildlife Ponds

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## Why do we need ponds?

**Ponds provide bathing and drinking water for garden birds and animals. Frogs and newts and some insects, such as dragonflies, need ponds to lay eggs and for their offspring to develop.**

Unfortunately, freshwater habitats are in massive decline in the UK and Ireland.

This means that every pond makes a difference – even small ponds can be home to many watery animals. And a network of ponds across a landscape can provide a way for wetland wildlife to travel from place to place. With some planning your garden could support a whole host of wetland wildlife.

Ponds make a wonderful garden feature and are fantastic for wildlife. Creating a wildlife pond can attract frogs, newts, dragonflies, water beetles and many other aquatic insects into your garden. Wetland flowering plants are brilliant for pollinators and can bring a pop of colour too.

## Share your garden!

- Northern Ireland has only two species of amphibian, the smooth newt and common frog.
- Dragonfly larvae can live in a pond for up to three years before they emerge as adults.
- Diving beetles come to the surface to replenish the air supply they store beneath their wings.
- Avoid including ornamental fish like koi or goldfish as they are voracious eaters of frogspawn and insects.



# How you can Let Nature In



## How to Create a Wildlife Pond

### Step 1 – Pick the Perfect Spot

You want your pond to be on a flat bit of ground, in a sunny spot away from trees or tall plants which cast long shadows and drop bits of vegetation into the pond. Make sure your pond gets plenty of light, although a little shade for some of the day is good.



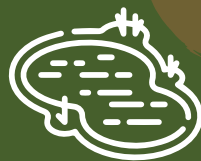
### Step 2 – Build your Pond

If you have space, you can dig out a pond and use a premade pond mould or liner to make it watertight. Remember to make sure the sides are level. For smaller gardens, why not get creative and create a pond out of a barrel or old sink?

However you choose to build your pond, it's important to make sure one side is gently sloping so that animals such as frogs and hedgehogs can get out – you can build a slope out of stones if you need to.

### Step 3 – Fill your Pond

The best way to fill your pond is letting it fill naturally with rainwater!



### Step 4 – Choose Plants

Plants are an important part of your wildlife pond, enriching the water with oxygen and providing food and shelter. Native species of plant are best for our wildlife. Check out your local garden centre for pond plants and take care to select native species as invasive pond plants can be very harmful to our water environment if they spread outside your garden.

### Step 5 – Enjoy!

Sit back and watch what creatures set up home in your new pond. Occasionally you should clear out some of the leaves that build up, but not all of them as insects and frogs use this to shelter in throughout the winter.



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Frog © Jonathan Clark; Sparrows © Chris Speller

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# Small Garden Solutions

Let nature in 



What if I don't have a garden?

If your outdoor space is limited, there is still lots you can do for wildlife! Scientists have found that insect populations have crashed by 75% in the last 30 years, and we need to use every space available to help them recover. Even small gardens can be a big help.

**No matter the size, every action to support wildlife helps with nature's recovery.**

Your outdoor space could be a crucial part of a patchwork of wildlife-friendly pit stops to help wildlife thrive and move across the landscape. Every balcony, yard or window ledge can be used to help bring nature back.

These ideas are great for any garden but particularly useful for small spaces.

- Nectar rich window boxes
- Vertical gardens
- Hanging baskets and feeders
- Bug hotels
- Water features



# How you can Let Nature In



## Window Boxes

Window boxes can brighten up your window ledge and patio, and they also provide great nectar sources for insects. Herbs like lavender, thyme, chives, and marjoram are brilliant for insects; plus they're low-maintenance, smell lovely, and can be used in the kitchen too. You can also plant native wildflower seed to create a window meadow! Use peat-free compost, water regularly, and remember you don't need a terracotta pot – any container that allows drainage will do.

## Trellis

If you have the space, installing a trellis will allow climbing plants to establish in your outdoor space. Attach the trellis to something strong, a post or a wall, and plant climbing plants in a pot beneath it. Climbers like honeysuckle, clematis and ivy are not only great for pollinators, but birds also love their berries and seeds. Once established, cut it back regularly to encourage growth.

## Hanging Baskets and Feeders

Hanging baskets can act as mini-floating gardens for insects. Add different plants that flower at different times of year to ensure there is nectar available in every season, for example primrose in the spring and scabious flowers in

the summer. You can also hang bird feeders and drinking stations.

## Insect Hotel

A small artificial insect hotel can provide homes for lots of insects. Different insects need different types of insect hotels; solitary bees need hollow bamboo canes or holes drilled into a wooden stump, while chamber boxes are great for butterflies and ladybirds. Hotels should ideally be positioned south facing, a metre off the ground, and insects should have unobstructed access to the hotel. Fix securely to a wall or fence post. Ideally place it near a window box or hanging basket so the insects don't need to travel far to feed.

## Pond in a Bucket

A watertight container, bucket or old sink can make a great home for pond plants and wildlife. Fill with rainwater and add native pond plants and it will become home to lots of insects in no time! Make sure there is a little step up or a big stone in it so frogs can get in and out and birds and insects can perch to drink.



[ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in](http://ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in)

Small garden © Penny Dixie; Bee drinking station © Maureen Carvill; Window box © Sean Freese

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# Let Nature into your garden All Year Round



Let nature in 

## January



© Andrew Parkinson / 2020VISION

**January is the time to cut back hedges and shrubs to encourage new growth.**

This will help to thicken up hedges and provide better habitat for birds during the breeding season.

## February



© Ross Hoddinott / 2020VISION

**It's time to get your garden ready for spring!**

February is a great time to get bird boxes up in your garden. Remember different species of birds require different styles of nesting boxes.

## March



© Jon Hawkins

**In March hedgehogs will be waking up from hibernation.**

Make sure they have some water available and plenty of natural food sources, as they will be hungry and thirsty.

## April



© Suzanna Bird

**Plant native flowers so that insects have enough nectar to feed on.**

You can create a butterfly border using flowers like primrose, a bright hanging basket, plant climbers, or provide a window box.

## May



© Jon Hawkins

**You may need to do some weeding this month.**

Cut back grass to allow flowers, shrubs and trees to grow. Encourage lady-birds, as they are great pest control. Avoid pesticides and leave the hedges and trees, as birds will be nesting.

## June



© Penny Frith

**Your garden will be thriving at this time of year!**

One way to enjoy it, and to find out what is there, is to create a garden species list. Record everything you see throughout the year!

## July



© Chris Speller

**Provide garden wildlife with water during warmer weather.**

You can provide a pond, a bird bath or a shallow dish for hedgehogs and insects to drink from. Collect rainwater for this purpose if possible.

## August



© David Tipling / 2020 VISION

**Growing fruit and veg in your garden is great for wildlife.**

Bees love apple blossom and caterpillars will lay eggs on broccoli and cabbage. In August you can harvest some of these natural goodies.

## September



© Paul Hobson

**If you have a wildflower meadow, now is the time to cut it.**

This stops rank vegetation forming and by leaving it to September it allows the seeds to drop. Make sure you lift the cuttings to reduce the nutrients in the soil.

## October



© Gillian Day

**Hedgehogs will start to hibernate as the weather gets colder.**

You can provide a safe place for them to sleep through the winter – a hedgehog box, log or leaf pile.

## November



© Dale Sutton / 2020 VISION

**Bats need a safe space to spend the winter.**

They go into a semi-hibernation known as torpor. Putting a bat box in a warm sheltered spot on a tree can provide them with the shelter they need.

## December



© Ben Hall / 2020 VISION

**Make sure to provide food for the birds during the cold weather.**

You can provide different food for different species. Remember that it's important to clean your feeders every year!



# Ten Wins for Wildlife

See your Let Nature In guides for more information!

- 1 Help hedgehogs
- 2 Provide a pond
- 3 Plant for pollinators
- 4 Plant a hedge
- 5 Make a mini meadow
- 6 Help garden birds
- 7 Provide homes for wildlife
- 8 Go peat-free
- 9 Find small garden solutions
- 10 Choose native planting



Find more wildlife gardening tips at [ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in](https://ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in)

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