



How community gardens can contribute to biodiversity

What is biodiversity and why is it important?

Biodiversity is the term used to describe the biological diversity and interconnectedness of all living things, including us. In a nutshell, to sustain healthy lives we need biodiversity and it needs us.

In purely practical terms without pollinators we would lose many of our favourite foods: tomatoes, peas, apples and strawberries, but aside from that can you imagine your site without birdsong, creepy crawlies or butterflies?

There are many simple, practical ways to increase biodiversity at project level. To simplify things we will refer to biodiversity in this document as wildlife.

How gardening with wildlife can help you

- Pollination of crops
- Pest control: ladybirds eat aphids, frogs eat slugs, birds eat grubs – the more wildlife you have the fewer chemicals you need!
- It's a great way to incorporate 'mindfulness' or quiet time into a therapeutic project or a particularly noisy session.
- It can be a brilliant way of attracting small amounts of grant funding.





What you need to know

Central to attracting more birds, bugs and beasties is understanding the concept of food and shelter. You don't just want 'wildlife' to visit your garden you want it to move in! A little time spent researching the food requirements and habitats of the wildlife you would like to see more of is time well spent.

Some basics to get you started:

- *Bees*: Ensure you have something flowering from mid-March to end of October. Bees prefer white, blue and purple coloured flowers and preferably (but not always) ones with a tubular type flower. Try Crocus, Lungwort, Rosemary, Catmint, and Sedum. Bumblebees like to nest in compost heaps or piles or leaves so don't be over tidy.
- *Butterflies*: Need a warm, sheltered spot - let's face it you never see them on a wet, windy day. If you have a sunny sheltered spot then plant flowers with 'landing pads' such as *Verbena bonariensis*, Fennel and Buddleia. These are also appreciated by hoverflies and lacewings. Many butterflies like to lay

their eggs on nettles and the young caterpillars eat the leaves. If you can dedicate a small warm patch to nettles the butterflies will arrive.

- *Birds*: Like a combination of things to eat; some are seed lovers, others like berries, grubs or worms. If you have the space, add dimension to your garden by planting evergreen shrubs, a thick hedge for nesting, e.g. *Pyracantha* - or better still a fruit bearing tree such as Rowan or crab apple. The seed heads of sunflowers, teasels and ornamental thistles are also attractive in the winter months
- *Beasties*: Invertebrates are often overlooked in a wildlife garden yet key to everything else. Ladybirds come into this category and everyone loves a ladybird, but ladybirds eat aphids - in the wildlife garden the stuff you do want is often attracted by the things you don't.
- To boost your microorganisms and worm population the obvious solution is a compost heap and healthy soil. For creepy crawlies such as woodlice and spiders (great for a mini beast hunts) let a small patch of grass grow long or build a log pile in a damp shady area.
- *Ponds*: An excellent source of wildlife from frogs, newts and dragonflies to pond snails, diving beetles and water skaters. You don't need a large pond but depth is important to ensure species survival in the winter months and plants surrounding the pond are vital for 'traffic' between your pond and the rest of the garden. A healthy pond can provide hours of fun watching things squirm and wriggle!

10 top general tips

1. Try to avoid using chemicals in your garden wherever possible.
2. Remember bare soil works for no one. It is an opportunity wasted and means that wildlife cannot move freely through the garden for fear of being exposed to predators.
3. Build a compost heap, and make your own leaf mould. Look for alternatives to peat..
4. Add dimension to the garden by planting shrubs, and covering fences and walls with climbers.
5. Plant a tree, if you are limited for space try a dwarf fruit tree or crab apple.
6. Where planting for nectar try and plant in clumps with a range of flowering time and a mix of flower types.
7. Don't cut back flower stems until the start of spring, this provide invaluable nesting opportunities for ladybirds and their friends.
8. Let the grass grow a little longer and enjoy the extra time you have.
9. Try and use a combination of spring flowering bulbs, summer flowering plants and fruit bearing trees or shrubs to keep your wildlife fed all year round.
10. Where possible try and create more than one type of habitat, e.g. flower beds, walls, trees, hedges, log piles, ponds, herb garden.

Any questions?

Q: We only have a really small area and our main focus is food growing
Herbs - rosemary, chives, thyme, marjoram and fennel - are all firm friends with bees, hoverflies and butterflies and

useful in the kitchen or for teas too. Or how about a small fruit tree? The bees will enjoy early summer nectar and you can hang a bird feeder from one of the branches.

Q: Do we have to go 'native'?
Not necessarily, the important thing is to plant relatively simple flowers that your wildlife can access. Modern day hybrids with double flowers etc. can make pollination difficult.

Q: Wildlife gardening is so messy - will that not put people off?
Gardening for wildlife does not have to be messy. Obviously debris such as leaf litter, seed heads in the winter or slightly longer grass all provide additional habitats and shelter from predators that pristine gardens don't. You just need to strike a balance.

Q: How do we know if biodiversity has increased on our site?
This is hard to measure but it is useful to know if your efforts have paid off - and sometimes funders want to know too. Follow our ten top tips. Start to develop an awareness of what to look for, where and when and you will start to tune in to the wildlife in your garden.

Collecting information

Best done on a lovely day!

On the back page of this factsheet is a simple recording sheet that we hope will encourage people to spend some time looking at wildlife activity in the garden. Please photocopy freely.

Walk around your site to find different kinds of creatures. Try using this sheet once every season to see a change in the wildlife using your garden.

The results of this activity can be used:

- As a topic for a winter discussion around creating habitats for wildlife.
- To inform the National database (NBN Gateway), through:www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/home
- As a way to check that your project is actually making a difference and increasing wildlife (this evidence could be required by funders).
- Information about the wildlife in your garden can contribute to the overall picture of what is happening to different species UK wide to contribute towards conservation..

Unsure about what you have seen?

Try using one of these resources.

Bees

<http://bumblebeeconservation.org/about-bees/identification/>

Butterflies

www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/identification.php

Birds

www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdidentifier

Bugs

www.buglife.org.uk/bugs-and-habitats/bug-identifier

Resources

Information and case studies of wildlife gardening in a community setting.

www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk/News/PDFs/BiodiversityCommunityGardens.pdf

Information on different plant types, habitat creation and things to look out for.

www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk/habitats.aspx

How to introduce native species into your garden.

www.plantlife.org.uk/uploads/documents/PLANTLIFE_Grow_wild_FOR_WEB.pdf

Simple, laminated guides to help you identify wildlife when you find it. www.field-studies-council.org/publications/fold-out-charts.aspx

Website packed full of creative ideas for involving children and adults in the outdoors.

www.naturedetectives.org.uk

Isport is a user friendly, web based identification tool that helps you identify and share what you have seen. www.ispotnature.org

FCFCG case studies of community gardens gardening for wildlife:

www.farmgarden.org.uk/scotland



Recording the wildlife in your community farm or garden

Location:

Date:

Walk around the community garden to find different kinds of creatures. You'll have more luck finding butterflies and bees in a sheltered spot on a sunny day. Try using this sheet once every season to see a change in the wildlife using your garden. Leave no log or stone unturned, as damp dark places may be fruitful with certain beasties!

Species	Draw a picture, take a photo or write a description	How many are there? 1-2, 3-5, more than 10?	Where is it? e.g. log pile, trees, herb garden etc	What is it doing? e.g. flying, feeding, resting	Notes - have a close look and note anything of interest
Bee					
Butterfly					
Bird					
Beastie					
Pondlife					

You can use this information online at: www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/home where the information will feed into a national database and inform conservation practice.