

CREATING A WILDLIFE HABITAT



HOW TO CREATE A THREE-IN-ONE EASY WILDLIFE HABITAT WITH AND FOR CHILDREN

The natural habitats of many species of wildlife are being destroyed, this is resulting in the loss of many native wildlife species in our country. This loss has a negative effect on the biodiversity of the land.

However, we can all help by encouraging wildlife into a corner of our gardens. By doing so biodiversity is increased which is great for the environment and the planet.

By creating a wildlife corner, it is giving nature the chance to find a special home (habitat) in the corner of the garden. A habitat is an area that the creatures live and grow in. There are three things that all wildlife creatures need in a habitat, food, water and shelter.

The thrill of watching wildflowers, birds, butterflies, insects, mini-beasts and mammals gradually start to occupy the wildlife area that has been created gives a joy in the heart, an excitement and education for children that is priceless. It is great for nature and great for us too!

Please do share your wildlife gardens with us to help inspire others by using **@GTFcymru** and **#GrowingTheFuture**. **Let's have fun with nature together!**

THREE-IN-ONE WILDFLOWER PATCH, MINI POND, MINI-BEAST HIDEOUT

These projects are all linked as they can all be made together, there is no waste of materials as all the materials are used to make each habitat.

Follow the step-by-step instructions to achieve the three in one wildlife garden.

Finding an ideal spot: The best place is a corner of the garden that is not used, can remain undisturbed and is partly shady. It doesn't have to be flat.

Time taken: With children's help, allow two or three relaxed afternoons.

Materials needed:

- Logs these can be bought or sourced from a tree surgeon, firewood seller or a neighbour doing a garden project
- Stones or bricks
- Large plastic storage container with lid
- Bucket of sand
- Spade
- Wildflower seed
- Pond plants
- Gravel

WILDFLOWER PATCH

By creating a wildflower patch the benefits will be twofold, great to look at and great for the environment too. Wildflower patches look beautiful, they will cheer up an otherwise unused corner of the garden and they are a perfect habitat for bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects during the

summer. In the autumn the seeds are good for the birds. Wildflowers like poor soil so there is no need to add compost.

Instructions:

1. **Prepare the ground** - mark out the size that is required, it can be anything from half a meter to two meters squared.
2. Dig around the area with a spade and carefully slice off the turf like a carpet, if it is just a weedy area do the same with the weeds.
3. If there is turf, turn the turf upside down and lay on the ground as the base for the mini-beast hideout.
4. Rake the surface of the soil that has just been exposed for the wildflower patch until it is fine and crumbly.
5. **Sow the seeds** - the seeds can be sown from the beginning of May until June, scatter wildflower seed fairly thickly over the surface of the soil.
6. Rake in the seeds and ask the children to flatten the surface by walking over the seeds, this will hopefully stop the birds eating the seeds from the surface.
7. Keep the seeds well-watered.
8. If there are cats in the area, stick lots of small twigs in the bed to deter them from using it as a litter tray.
9. The seeds will emerge in one week and will start to flower in June/ July.
10. In the winter, after the flowers have died down, cover the bed with flattened cardboard and bricks or heavy plant pots, the weeds will be suppressed and the worms will get to work crumbling the soil underneath ready to be sown again the next May.

Education activities to do with children:

- Identify the different flowers growing
- Watch to see which insects pollinate the flowers and identify them

MINI POND

Adding a water feature, like a small pond, is a great way to attract a variety of wildlife to your garden. All creatures need a constant source of fresh, un-chlorinated water, a pond will attract:

- Amphibians such as toads, frogs and newts
- Water insects such as water boatmen, whirligig beetles and dragonfly larvae
- Birds will use the water for drinking and washing in



Instructions:

1. Decide where the pond will be and measure around the plastic storage container.
2. Dig a hole big enough to snuggly fit the container into, so that it is slightly lower than the level of the ground. Make sure the base of the hole is flat.
3. Place the soil from the hole onto the upturned turf for the mini-beast hide out. This will create a mound for the hideout.
4. Use the sand to cover the base of the hole to ensure that there is a flat sound base for the plastic container to rest on.
5. Place the container in the hole as the pond.
6. Place logs, bricks or stones around the edge of the container.
7. Place some gravel in the bottom of the container.
8. Place clean bricks, stones and tiles in the container to create a way for creatures to escape.
9. Create little hide-a-ways in the pond container for creatures to hide and feel safe in.
10. Allow the pond to fill with rain water.
11. Plant a few pond plants in to create oxygen and cover for the creatures.

Note: If very young children or babies come to visit simply cover the pond over with the lid from the plastic container.

Education activities to do with children:

- Make an underwater viewer to look at the water below the surface
- Take a large yoghurt pot cut out the base and replace with cling film and an elastic band
- Touch the skin of the water like a pond skater
- Make a walnut boat or empty snail shell boat to float on the pond

LOG PILE BUG HIDEOUT

Creating a pile of rotting wood is a perfect wildlife habitat or home for many species of invertebrates and insects such as beetles, earwigs, woodlice, centipedes, millipedes, worms and grubs. All of these creatures play an important role in nature. They break down rotting wood and leaves turning them into compost and they are also a food source for birds, frogs, toads, and hedgehogs too. The hideout also provides a shelter for hibernating small mammals and insects.

Children love discovering bugs and mini-beasts, and a log pile hideout is the perfect place to discover the creatures close up.



Instructions:

1. The bug hideout has almost been built from the wildflower patch and the pond.
2. The turf from the wildflower patch is turned upside down for the base of the hideout.
3. The soil from the pond is piled in the centre of the turf as a mound for worms.
4. Start by partially burying the longer logs vertically in the soil.
5. Use logs of different diameters, lengths and shapes, place them side-by-side to form a pyramid.
6. Ensure there are lots of nooks and crannies for insects and mammals.
7. Fill any gaps and cover the soil with moss, dry leaves or bark.
8. Plant some damp, shade loving plants in the gaps such as ferns.
9. In very dry, hot weather keep the hideout damp.

Education activities to do with children:

- Have a bug hunt – Using a magnifying glass or a magnifying pot to find and identify the bugs. Always replace the bugs where they were found to carry on their important work in the log pile hideout.

ADDITIONS TO YOUR WILDLIFE AREA

TOAD HOLE

Toads love damp dark places to hide near water and a good food source. They like to feast upon insects, slugs and worms.

Toads may decide to use the wildlife area as their new home. To make it attractive and welcoming create a dark hiding place for the toads.

Instructions:

1. Find flat stones or pieces of slate to build a dark shelter.
2. Use a terracotta pot or pipe and half bury it in the ground leaving an opening.

When trying to find toads, they can usually be seen at night or occasionally in the daytime after a good rain, from March to October.

CHILD-SIZED BIRD SNACK BAR

Birds are losing their natural habitats and food sources. Birds will be attracted to the area because of the water and the insects in the log pile hideout. To make the area even more attractive for the birds a simple twig snack bar can be made. This will help them survive during the winter months. This will also aid the growth of young chicks in the spring.

Instructions:

1. Fill a heavy clay pot with stones and soil.
2. Find a large cut off branch or several branches.
3. Wedge the branches between the stones and fill around with soil and or sand.
4. Arrange different homemade bird treats on the branches.

BIRDS SNACK CHALLENGE

Try to make as many different snacks for the birds to hang on the branches. Share your ideas, recipes and photos with us by using **@GTCymru** and **#GrowingTheFuture!**

Here are some suggestions:

- Apple kebabs
- Pinecone feeders
- Seed cakes
- Stuffed oranges



TOAD HOLE



BIRD SNACK BAR



BIRD SNACKS

HEDGEHOG FEEDING HOUSE

Hedgehogs are nocturnal foragers that may be attracted to the log pile hideout looking for a tasty snack of a slug or beetle. In the daytime they find a quiet spot to sleep, by providing a shelter, hedgehogs will feel safer coming to the area to feed and rest.

Instructions:

1. Choose a quiet spot.
2. Cut an entrance hole in a wooden box 12cm squared.
3. Cover the box with logs, stones or leaves.



WILDFLOWER CHALLENGE

Planting wildflowers attracts bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects, which will increase the biodiversity in the garden. Become a scientist and record how many different insects visit the flowers.

Wildflowers can be planted in all sorts of containers and placed wherever a corner needs to be brightened up. Let your imagination run wild and find the most original container to plant them in.

Post or send pictures of your most imaginative containers, please do share with us by using **@GTCymru** and **#GrowingTheFuture**.

Instructions:

Wildflower seeds can be sown from the beginning of May until June. They will give a beautiful show of flowers from July until October.

1. Ideally find a container with small drainage holes in the base.
2. If the container doesn't have holes use a cardboard box lined with newspaper or a plant pot or plastic tray. Place the box, tray or pot in the container.
3. Line the container with newspaper if needed and fill the container with peat-free compost or soil from the garden.
4. Scatter the wild flower seeds on the top and gently press the soil flat.
5. Keep watered.
6. The seeds should appear in one week.

Please note: Make sure that the owner of the container is happy for it to be used.

GROWING THE FUTURE

The Growing the Future project at the National Botanic Garden of Wales is a five-year project to champion Welsh horticulture, plants for pollinators, the protection of wildlife and the virtues of growing plants for food, fun, health and well-being.

Whether you are a seasoned gardener, a fledgling grower or a budding beekeeper – we want to help provide training, information and support to you. For more information on the project's events and courses, please call **01558 667150**, email gtf@gardenofwales.org.uk or visit botanicgarden.wales/science/growing-the-future.

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