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Creating wildlife habitats



Introduction

We can encourage 'wildlife' into the garden by creating habitats in which they like to live in or by providing foods they like to eat.

Facts

• Mini beasts (creepy-crawlies, spiders, bugs and

insects) make up 95% of the earth's creatures

- · Butterflies taste with their feet
- · Male bees have no sting
- A ladybird eats about 75 aphids a day

Encouraging wildlife into the garden

- Bees assist in pollinating flowers and also make honey
- Birds eat slugs and snails
- Butterflies, hoverflies and beetles assist in pollinating flowers
- Centipedes, Earwigs and Woodlice eat

- decaying plant matter, so assist in the creation of compost
- Frogs & toads eat slugs and snails
- Ladybirds eat greenfly
- Worms help assist in drainage and aeration of the soil

How to attract mini beasts to the garden

- Mini beasts like to hide in dark sheltered places, so try and create some nice homes or 'wildlife habitats' for them. Place a pile of logs or rocks in a shady corner. This habitat, if left undisturbed, will support a wide range of invertebrates.
- Mini beasts (and other) wildlife are attracted to our native species as they provide nectar and pollen.
- Oak, Silver Birch, Rowan, Hawthorn, Hazel and Holly are all native.
- Buddleia, Cotoneaster and Pyracantha are also good for wildlife, but not natives.
- If possible try and grow a mixture of native and non-native plants. Choose plants that flower at different times of year to ensure that pollen and nectar are available over a long period. Select trees and shrubs with berries for birds and other animals.

- Create a water feature in your garden. A pond, ideally without fish, will enable amphibians and dragonflies to breed. If a pond is not practical, a simple bird bath or pebble fountain will provide a place for animals to drink.
- Leave an area of lawn un-mown. Long grass is an excellent habitat for grasshoppers, beetles and young amphibians, and provides roosts for insects such as damselflies. Grasses are also important food sources for the caterpillars of some butterflies.
- Bird nest boxes are a classic way of attracting birds to the garden, but nowadays the concept has been widened to include many other animals. You can buy (or often make quite simply) nesting or shelter boxes for hedgehogs, bats, solitary bees, bumblebees, ladybirds, lacewings and many other insects.

Activities

Creating a habitat pile

These can be piles of logs, stones, hollow stems and canes, or just about anything else. A habitat pile will provide food and shelter for a wide variety of insects. Habitat piles should be placed in partial shade directly on soil or turf.

If possible use logs from broad leaved trees like oak, ash, beech, elm and sycamore.

You can increase the numbers of available hiding places by drilling holes of various sizes in a few of the logs.

Create a Lacewing habitat

Roll up a piece of corrugated cardboard and place inside a waterproof container such as an old lemonade bottle with the top cut off. Hang in shrubs or trees

Create a bee habitat

Take a large tin can (catering food tins or coffee containers are ideal). If a tin can is not available try a 2 litre drinks bottle with the top and bottom removed. If using a tin you will need to paint it so that it will not rust. Cut bamboo lengths (or large paper straws) to fit the can and place inside, ensure the lengths are about 5-8mm internal diameter and are packed tight so they will not fall out. Hang in a sunny sheltered position.

Create a hiding place for beetles

Take an old plant pot (preferably a terracotta one) and stuff full of straw, place upside down under a hedge or in long grass. Ensure the lip is kept off the ground using a small stone.

Basically any sheltered undisturbed area of the garden will harbour wildlife so try and incorporate a variety of habitats into the space.

Make a winter bird-cake

You will need the following ingredients / equipment:

- Mixed garden bird food
- Lard (1 part fat to 2 parts bird food)
- Empty yoghurt pots
- 25cm lengths of string
- Saucepan
- Wooden spoon
- · Mixing bowl

Method:

Melt lard in saucepan. Place bird food into mixing bowl and get an adult to add the melted lard.

Get children to stir the mixture.

Place the string into yoghurt pots so that it coils around the bottom and also protrudes from the top. Spoon in the mixture until pot is full. Leave to cool and set. Once set, dip pot into warm water for a second and slide out the cake from the mould, and hang from trees.