LET OUR GARDENS LIVE!
A Manifesto for Gardens, People and Nature

Wildlife Gardening Forum
www.wlgf.org
The **Wildlife Gardening Forum** is a consortium of the UK’s leading wildlife and horticultural organisations, from both the private and the public sectors.

This **Manifesto** highlights the importance of gardens, both for wildlife and for people’s health and wellbeing. It is aimed at those who make and influence decisions.

It outlines some of the **actions** we need to take to protect gardens – and to help more people enjoy and support their garden wildlife.
Our vision for gardening and wildlife

We want more people to:

- discover how important gardens can be for wildlife
- find enjoyment, interest and health benefits from gardening with wildlife in mind
- use gardens to give children a richer environment for learning and play
- understand how they can adapt their gardening to provide valuable new habitats for wildlife

We want people to create more gardens that:

- are beautiful and peaceful places to enjoy
- contain habitats for wildlife complementing those in nearby gardens and green spaces
- form a green network to help protect us from flooding and overheating
- extend the resources available for wildlife in a changing global environment

We want to raise awareness of the environmental benefits of gardening with wildlife in mind by encouraging:

- the use of materials from sustainably-managed sources, such as peat-free compost
- gardening techniques that help wildlife to adapt to climate change
- the home-growing of food in an environmentally-friendly way, for healthier living and to reduce food miles
- the avoidance of invasive plant species or products demonstrably damaging to wildlife
- less intensive garden management
- reduced use of concrete, paving and decking in gardens - surfaces that support little or no wildlife
Gardens cover around 4,330 square kilometres of the UK, an area one fifth the size of Wales. Large or small, urban or rural, gardens can support an extraordinary diversity of plants and invertebrates, food for many birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

But all over the country, many gardens are becoming a poorer habitat for wildlife. New ‘infill’ houses have been built on former mature domestic gardens; more people now have paved patios in their gardens than have trees; decking and car parking have removed yet more habitat.

For example, in London between 1990 and 2008, 30 km$^2$ of garden vegetation was lost to paving or building – equal to two and a half Hyde Parks per year. In some places, the situation is even worse; for example, nearly half of all homeowners in North East England have paved over most of their front gardens.
Gardens and wildlife: The Potential

Gardens cannot replace specialised habitats. They can, however, provide havens for many of the species now declining on intensively managed farmland in the countryside, from bumblebees and hedgehogs to song thrushes and frogs.

As our climate changes, the network of gardens will help our wildlife to adapt and migrate through the country.

**To address the problems and realise the potential of our gardens, we need:**

- to gather and interpret evidence of the role of gardens in supporting biodiversity and environmental sustainability
- to support studies on how best to manage individual gardens, neighbourhoods and public green space for wildlife
- to promote research and testing for plants and commercial products aimed at attracting or supporting garden wildlife, so people can choose plants and products that will genuinely help wildlife and the environment
- to get more people involved in monitoring garden wildlife to increase understanding of environmental change

Photos: Adrian Thomas
How wildlife gardening can benefit people

Research has shown that both gardens and wildlife are good for people’s health, happiness and wellbeing.

Gardens have a unique combination of roles – outdoor classroom and playground; places for healthy and productive exercise and relaxation; and private sanctuaries for people and wildlife.

Gardens are where many children make their first contact with the natural world. They are also often the only places where adults now encounter any wildlife that isn’t on a screen.

To ensure that these benefits are fully realised, we need:

- to help people value and enjoy wildlife in their gardens, encouraging a deeper appreciation of biodiversity and the environment
- simpler, more consistent and fact-based information to help people make informed choices about their gardening practices to benefit themselves, the environment and wildlife
- all children to have access to a garden rich in wildlife, at home and at school

'Gardens are where many children make their first contact with the natural world'.

Photo: RSPBImages.com
Gardens and the Human Environment: Planning and Development

Gardens can help make towns and cities more pleasant places in which to live. They can assist the slow, safe drainage of rainwater and thus reduce the risk of flash flooding. They can also filter out atmospheric dust, cut down wind speeds and reduce the heat island effect which can kill vulnerable people in heat waves. And yet gardens remain at risk from infilling and hard landscaping. Once built on, gardens are lost for ever.

To address this, we need decision-makers to:

- recognise the importance of gardens and green infrastructure for the environment, wildlife, human well-being and social cohesion
- ensure that towns and cities contain enough private gardens and public green space to make them liveable
- protect existing gardens and manage public green space more effectively for wildlife and people
- create more wildlife-friendly features in new developments
10 simple ways to help wildlife in gardens

- Grow a variety of trees, shrubs and climbers, and plant a hedge, to give food and shelter
- Look after mature trees in and around your garden - they are the best features for many species of wildlife
- Add water – an upturned bin-lid is a start or, better still, a pond
- Brighten your garden throughout the year with pollen- and nectar-rich flowers for bees, butterflies and other insects
- Create a pile of dead wood, preferably half buried, making a home for everything from beetles to hedgehogs
- Build a compost heap, which helps wildlife and your gardening
- Provide food and water for birds year round. Keep the feeders clean so they don’t spread disease
- Relax! Leave some areas undisturbed and take time to enjoy the wildlife they attract
- Allow a patch of lawn grass to grow longer, helping flowering plants to bloom, and creating habitat for insects and small mammals
- Minimise your use of water, peat, chemicals and other resources to reduce your impact on the wider environment

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