



giving
nature
a home



ways to
give nature
a home



Make nature welcome

Across the UK, nature is feeling the squeeze.

Gone are vast swathes of wild flower meadows, miles of hedgerows and hundreds of ponds: there are fewer and fewer places for wildlife to call home. More than 60% of the UK species assessed are declining, so it's more important than ever that we work together to help them.

There are lots of fun and effective things you can do to make nature feel welcome in your patch, and you'll find 20 suggestions in this booklet to get you started. Plus, there are lots more online at rspb.org.uk/homes.

The survival of the nature around us depends on all of us, and you can make a real difference whether you have a country acre or an urban balcony. If we all do our bit, we can connect up the green spaces in the UK, so our wildlife can move around and thrive.

So what are you waiting for? Get out there, have fun and give nature a home!

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Be lazy



Do you like relaxing in your garden or outside space and putting your feet up? Good news. Even by doing nothing, you're creating a home for nature.

1 Give your mower a rest

Easy peasy. Anyone can do it.

Instead of toiling away with your mower, try leaving your lawn (or even just a patch of it) uncut all the way through summer, until autumn. The long grass will provide shelter for minibeasts, including butterflies and moths. When it's time to cut your lawn, raise the blade height of your mower and leave longer between cuts. Visit rspb.org.uk/nomow for more advice.

2 Cut back on cutting back

A simple time-saver that's great for nature.

Rather than rushing into action with the secateurs as soon as your flowers have died off, leave them to go to seed. Birds, such as goldfinches, will appreciate the extra food, and minibeasts may hibernate in hollow stems over winter. The dry seed heads also add visual interest to otherwise bare winter borders.

Grow, grow, grow!

Plants are the key to a wildlife-friendly garden, and they look and smell fabulous too.



3 Grow flowering plants

Why not get your family involved?

Flowers are bloomin' marvellous – they're the best source of nectar, pollen and shelter for bees, butterflies and other insects, which in turn provide food for birds and small mammals. Pack as many of them as you can into your garden. Some flowers are better than others, so we've got all the advice you need to pick the perfect plants for bees, butterflies and other wildlife at [rspb.org.uk/homes](https://www.rspb.org.uk/homes).





// When we moved in to our new house, the garden was bare and lifeless. But soon after we got to work adding flowers and shrubs, and putting out food, wildlife began to visit. Doing the washing up is much more interesting now! //

Middleton family

4 **Plant a tree or shrub**
Buy it, plant it, watch it grow.
You'll need a bit of patience for this one, as trees and shrubs take time to mature – but they're worth the wait. Choose species that produce flowers, fruit, berries, hips or seeds and they will provide food for garden wildlife, as well as cover and nesting sites. A few wildlife favourites are crab apple, rowan, hawthorn and holly.

5 **Brighten up a dull wall or fence**
An afternoon project.

Most walls and fences aren't pretty, but it's easy to give them a makeover and help wildlife too. Grow climbers, such as ivy or honeysuckle, against trellis and they will provide food and shelter for birds and insects, as well as a focal point for you. If you're lucky, birds like wrens might raise their family there too.

6 **Create little green patches**
Perfect for small gardens and balconies.

No matter how small your outside space, you can still do your bit for wildlife. Lots of plants will grow very happily in containers on balconies or patios, or in window boxes and hanging baskets. Herbs such as thyme and rosemary make perfect container plants – not only are they brilliant for insects, they taste great too!



Home help

A nature-friendly garden will offer lots of places for wildlife to feed, shelter and breed. But for many creatures looking for somewhere to raise a family or hibernate in winter, an artificial home can be a valuable alternative to natural shelter. So dig out your tool box, dust off your kit and get building! You'll find detailed instructions for each of the following projects at rspb.org.uk/homes. Many are perfect for the whole family to get involved with.

If you prefer, you can skip the building bit and buy the finished article at rspbshop.co.uk.

7 Give a hog a home

Really easy. Great for the whole family.

First things first, for a hedgehog to set up home in your garden, it needs to be able to get in! So if your garden is surrounded by a fence or wall, make sure that there are gaps for hedgehogs and other wildlife to squeeze through. Come autumn, hedgehogs will be on the lookout for a cosy place to snuggle down and sleep away the winter. Log piles, compost heaps and sheltered nooks under sheds and hedges are all popular places.

If you'd like to have a go at building your own hedgehog home, visit rspb.org.uk/hedgehoghome for instructions.

Remember that hibernating hedgehogs like peace and quiet, so put the house where it won't be disturbed, against a wall or fence and surrounded by plants for cover. Face the entrance to the box away from cold north winds and resist the temptation to peek inside. The best way to see if a hedgehog has taken up residence is to leave damp sand or mud outside the entrance and keep an eye out for footprints.

8 Build a bee B&B

Couldn't be simpler. Young or old, have a go!

There are lots of species of solitary bee and, unlike honeybees, they don't live in a hive. Each spring the females search for hollow stems in which to lay their eggs, and you can help them by providing a ready-made residence. All you need to do is chop the end off a large plastic bottle and fill it with bamboo canes or drinking straws. Place it in a sunny spot, sheltered from wind and rain, and wait for the bees to investigate in spring – simple!

Lots of different homes for insects are available to buy at rspbshop.co.uk – check out the full range.



The Hogilo hedgehog house is available to buy from the RSPB online shop.

// In summer, our garden comes alive with tiny froglets leaving the pond and setting out on their own. It's a wonderful sight. //

Derek Niemann

9

Make a frog and toad abode

Dig out your spade and get stuck in.

If frogs, newts or toads visit your garden pond, you can give them safe lodgings by providing them with hiding places. They need moist, shady conditions where the air is cool to keep their skin in tip-top condition, so one option is to create a toad abode.

Dig a hole at least 30 cm deep and fill it with a mix of rubble, soil, leaves and logs. This will create an underground maze, full of gaps they can wriggle into. They'll reward your hard work by chomping pesky plant-munching slugs.

Alternatively, why not buy a Frogilo frog and toad shelter from our shop at rspbshop.co.uk?

10 Build a bat box

A fun afternoon project with your family.

Birds aren't the only winged creatures that benefit from a box – bats need homes too. Putting up a bat box will help these night-time creatures have somewhere safe to raise a family and sleep during the day. You'll find step-by-step instructions on making one at [rspb.org.uk/bathome](https://www.rspb.org.uk/bathome), or you can buy a ready-made bat box from our online shop at [rspbshop.co.uk](https://www.rspbshop.co.uk).

Once your box is ready, it's time to hang it up. Bats whizz to and from their roosts at high speed, so make sure your box is at head height or higher, with a clear flight path. A sheltered position under the eaves of a house, or on the trunk of a mature tree, away from bright lights is ideal. Don't worry if bats don't move in right away. They can be a bit slow finding new roosts, but once they do find it, your box will become the perfect place to call home.

11 Make a high-rise bug hotel

Put those bits and bobs to good use.

It's easier than you think to make a luxury five star bug hotel and you'll be surprised how many of the materials, like bricks and pine cones, that you already have lying around your home and garden. All you need is a steady hand to pile them up!

You can make your hotel as large or small as you wish – the only limitation is your imagination. Just remember to provide as many nooks and crannies as you can for minibeasts and other wildlife to shelter in.

Watch the video and find more instructions at [rspb.org.uk/bughotel](https://www.rspb.org.uk/bughotel).



This RSPB bat box is perfect for pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats.





12 Give your feathered friends a place to call home

An afternoon project.


No wildlife-friendly garden is complete without at least one nestbox. Even if you don't have a garden, a nestbox attached to the wall of your house could be the perfect place for birds to set up home. There are lots of different types of box to choose from, depending on the species you'd like to attract – check out [rspb.org.uk/homes](https://www.rspb.org.uk/homes) for more information.

As well as making a real difference to garden birds by providing a safe place for them to raise a family, putting up a nestbox means you'll also be able to see birds up close and get a really great insight into their lives. It's great fun to watch busy parents dashing backwards and forwards to feed their young, and if you're lucky, you might notice birds popping into your nestbox to shelter in winter too. A record 61 wrens were once found huddled together in a nestbox to keep warm!

There are lots of nestboxes you can buy from [rspbshop.co.uk](https://www.rspbshop.co.uk) too.

“ A family of house sparrows moved in to the nestbox on our wall and my daughter was mesmerised by their comings and goings. They kept her entertained for hours! ”

Hannah Goldstone

A close-up photograph of two mushrooms growing from a mossy log. The mushrooms have light pinkish-brown caps and gills, and thick, pale stems. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

“ Our dead wood pile is like having a mini nature reserve in the back garden. The grandchildren love discovering all the creepy crawlies that live there. ”

Ian Abrams

13 Bring your garden to life with dead wood

Easy. Just some dead wood required.

At first glance, a pile of dead wood might look just that – dead. But look closer and you’ll see that it’s alive with all kinds of fungi, mosses and lichens. As it decays, it will become a thriving bug hotel for a variety of minibeasts, and frogs, toads and other creatures may shelter in the nooks and crannies. What’s more, a dead wood pile is really easy to create. Just stack a variety of logs and branches in a sheltered spot and wait for the wildlife to move in! For more information visit rspb.org.uk/logpile.

If you have a balcony, you can still do your bit by filling a well-drained bucket with soil and wood chippings to attract bugs. To make it even better, you could add a couple of rotting branches and put your “bug bucket” next to flowers.

Be green when you garden

The idea of “going green” can be daunting, but the good news is that there are lots of simple things you can do to create a greener garden (and world). Here are just a few to get you started...

14 Catch the rain

Save money and save nature!

Using a water butt to collect and store rainwater is easy, and helps to conserve this precious resource. You can then use it to water the plants in your garden and top up your pond when it's getting a bit shallow. If you're on a water meter, you'll save money too.

15 Ditch harmful pesticides

Let nature do the work for you.

If you have an insect pest in your garden, consider using a natural method to deal with it, rather than pesticides, which often kill beneficial species too. The more wildlife-friendly you can make your garden, the better – all those creatures you encourage, like ladybirds, hedgehogs and frogs, will happily munch on pests such as aphids and slugs, helping to keep them at bay.

16

Start composting

It's cheap, easy and great for your garden.

The peat compost you find in garden centres has been taken from some of Europe's best places for wildlife. By making your own compost, or using peat-free alternatives, you will be helping to protect these precious places and the wildlife that calls them home.

Making compost is cheap and easy – all you need is uncooked kitchen scraps (such as fruit and vegetable peelings) and garden waste, plus a container to hold it all while it decays. You can build your own container (see [rspb.org.uk/compost heap](https://www.rspb.org.uk/compost-heap)), or buy a wooden or plastic bin. Just make sure that it has no base and sits on the soil to allow worms, insects and other creatures to get in and out. Add a thin layer of waste at a time and intersperse soft, leafy material with twiggy prunings.

Once the material has rotted down and formed lovely, crumbly compost, you can use it to improve the soil structure and drainage, as a mulch to cut down on water loss, and as a fertiliser to enrich the soil. You'll send less rubbish to landfill and make your plants happy too!

As well as being good for your garden and the environment, compost heaps are wildlife magnets. Not only do they develop their own community of minibeasts that helps the decay process along, they can also become a sheltering place and food source for small animals such as hedgehogs, frogs and even slow worms.



Just add water

It's simple: more water in your garden means more wildlife!

17 Dig a pond

A project to really get your teeth into.

If there's one thing that's guaranteed to attract a vast range of wildlife to your garden, it's a pond.

You can build your watery oasis at any time of year, but if you start in autumn or winter the reliable British rain will fill it naturally. Pick a sunny site, and try to avoid areas where leaves could fall into your pond and clog it up. It's best to line the pond with special butyl or EPDM rubber and create shallow edges to allow birds to bathe, hedgehogs to climb out if they fall in, and frogs to spawn. Your pond will also need a deep area of at least 45 cm (18 in) in the middle – this area won't freeze, so wildlife can spend the winter there safely.

For full instructions, visit rspb.org.uk/largepond.



18 Create a mini pond

Super simple and fun for all the family.

If you have a balcony or small garden, with no room for a full-blown pond, don't worry, size isn't everything – you can still help wildlife by creating a mini one. Get a washing up bowl or an old Belfast sink, add gravel to the bottom and pile rocks on one side to help animals climb in and out. Then add in native oxygenating plants, such as hornwort.

Although it will freeze easily and attract fewer bugs than a big pond, birds and other animals may come to drink and bathe.

You'll find more advice on making a mini pond at rspb.org.uk/smallpond.



Encouraging birds into your garden is simple: give them food!

The most natural way to do this is to grow plants with fruit, berries, seeds, hips or nuts which will act as an open-air larder for birds. The plants will also attract minibeasts for the birds to snack on.

You'll find advice on growing sunflowers as bird food at [rspb.org.uk/growbirdfood](https://www.rspb.org.uk/growbirdfood).



Feed the birds

19



Set up a garden restaurant

The birds will love you for it!

Providing additional food all year round will give the birds in your garden a boost, helping them to get through hard times and to feed their families. Birds come in all shapes and sizes, and each have their own favourite foods, so if you provide a variety of options, you are more likely to attract a range of different species. For example, goldfinches love sunflower hearts, while house sparrows prefer seed mixes. Calorie-rich bird cake will help birds to fatten up and survive cold winter weather, while juicy mealworms are particularly appreciated in spring, when busy parents are on the lookout for insects to feed to their growing chicks.

Remember to buy good quality feeders and keep them clean to prevent the spread of disease. You'll find a huge range of bird feeders and food at [rspbshop.co.uk](https://www.rspbshop.co.uk).

Spread the word

20 Tell everyone!

Together, we can make a difference.

To help nature even more, don't forget to tell your family, friends and neighbours what you've done and what you've seen. You'll find some cards in your pack to hand out to encourage them to join in and give nature a home.

If we all take a few small steps in our patch, we can create a network of connected gardens and green spaces extending across the UK, where wildlife can move freely and flourish. Together, we can give nature the home it needs.

To spread the word further, log in at rspb.org.uk/homes, upload your photos on Instagram or post on our RSPB Love Nature Facebook page with the hashtag **#homesfornature**, or include the tag **#homesfornature** in your Tweets.

Remember that this pack is just a taster of how you can give nature a home. You'll find all sorts of other activities, plus advice and inspiration at rspb.org.uk/homes.

“ It was my son who inspired me to do my bit for nature. Seeing the excitement on his face when he discovered a frog in the garden was wonderful. Now we're planning to dig a pond. ”

Siân Duncan



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A little (and big!) kid's guide to giving nature a home



Ever wondered what to do with an old, mushy banana?

Why not use it to create a buffet for butterflies? Mash the banana while it's still inside its skin, then cut slits along the top. Leave it outside, near some flowers, for butterflies to feast on. They also love rotten apples and squishy strawberries – try putting out plates of each to see which attracts the most butterflies. If wasps visit your buffet too, don't worry – if you leave them alone, they'll leave you alone too!



Butterfly by Fotolia, pinecones and banana by Shutterstock.

Butterfly and pine cone buffet feeders



Pine cones are great for filling with tasty treats. Tie a loop of string around the base for hanging, and then cram the gaps with goodies.

Grated cheese and raw pastry work well, and birds will love it even more if you squish these together with warm lard to create a super-tasty bird cake mixture. You can even dip the pine cones in melted suet or unsalted peanut butter and then sprinkle them with bird seed.

Do you know what creatures are about at night or early in the morning, when you're still tucked up in bed?

Make this **night tracker** to find out!

- 1** Pour some playground sand onto the ground outside, so that it's level.
- 2** Flatten the sand with a board or a plank of wood and put pieces of cheese or seeds in the middle as bait.
- 3** Leave it overnight and, in the morning, see what birds or mammals have walked on it. If you're not sure, download our guide to animal tracks at rspb.org.uk/families

Discover **night time** nature

Make a **moth lure**

Night-time is moth time! Find out what moths you have in your garden by making this special syrup to lure them in. Here's how...

- 1** Mix sugar, cola and syrup and heat gently in a pan until the sugar has dissolved and the liquid is like runny paint. Once cool, pour it into a jam jar.
- 2** Just before dusk on a dry day, use a paintbrush to spread the sticky syrup onto tree trunks or fence posts.
- 3** When darkness has fallen, head out with a torch covered with red cellophane (this way you won't disturb the moths, as they can't see red light) and see who's come for dinner!

Get creative with wellies

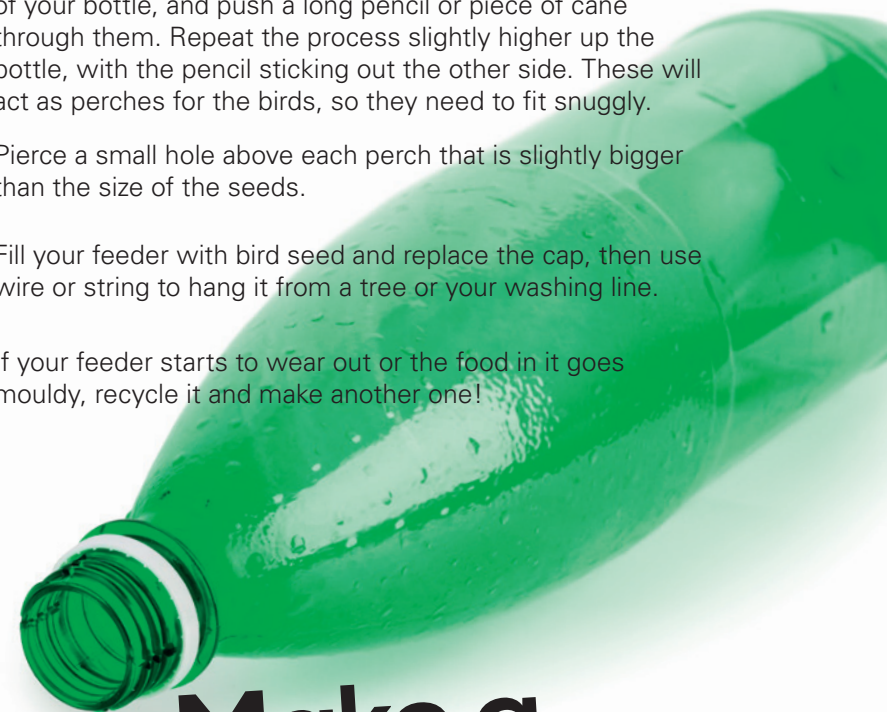
Instead of throwing away your old welly boots, transform them into funky plant pots.

- 1** Give your boots a wash inside and out, then ask a grown-up to carefully make some holes in the bottom of them, so that water can drain out.
- 2** Put a couple of handfuls of stones inside your wellies. These will weigh your boots down so that they don't topple over and will help with drainage.
- 3** Fill your boots with peat-free compost to just below the top. Now add your plants and fill any gaps with extra compost. Some wildlife-friendly plants you might like to try include lavender, thyme and alyssum.
- 4** Finish by giving the plants a good drink of water, and there you have it – a funky welly plant pot!

Rahul Thanki (rspb-images.com)

Make this bird feeder from the plastic bottles you would recycle.

- 1** Make two small holes opposite each other, near the bottom of your bottle, and push a long pencil or piece of cane through them. Repeat the process slightly higher up the bottle, with the pencil sticking out the other side. These will act as perches for the birds, so they need to fit snugly.
- 2** Pierce a small hole above each perch that is slightly bigger than the size of the seeds.
- 3** Fill your feeder with bird seed and replace the cap, then use wire or string to hang it from a tree or your washing line.
- 4** If your feeder starts to wear out or the food in it goes mouldy, recycle it and make another one!



Make a recycled bird feeder

Thanks

for helping to give nature a home.

We hope you have fun doing these activities. You'll find even more things to keep the kids entertained on the activity sheet inside – take a look!

Want to find loads more ideas to help you discover and save nature? Head to **rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature** for inspiration.

If you're more of a big kid than a little one, please pass this guide on to someone else who will enjoy it, to help give nature a home and connect gardens for wildlife.



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It's the best way to give nature a home across the whole of the UK today.

Buy

**something for your garden at
rspbshop.co.uk**

We have everything you need to make nature welcome in your patch. All profits go directly to helping us give nature a home.

Take part

at rspb.org.uk/homes

The place to go for even more advice and inspiration.

Give

a donation at rspb.org.uk/donate

Your gift today, whatever you can afford, will create a world richer in wildlife tomorrow. Thank you.

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Visit the site for more information, to see what others are doing, to enter competitions and more.



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