

Wildlife Gardening Tips



Nick is a keen gardener for wildlife and his latest project is greening up an urban alleyway behind his house with **Love My Street**, a collaborator of Green Earth Plan.

Based in Windsor, Love My Street has a clear purpose, to make the planet and people's lives better, street by street. To find out more you can join their [Facebook Community](#).

Photo by William Warby on Unsplash.

Here are my 'top dozen' thoughts on how best we can encourage more wildlife into our alley and also our gardens, as wildlife knows no boundaries!

1. Reduce hard landscaping and artificial turf as much as possible. Any natural area will provide a home for something. No matter how insignificant, it will support the web of life. Hard landscaping also amplifies heavy rainfall and contributes to flash flooding rather than absorbing rain and flattening out peaks in flow.
2. Plant as many native species as possible, as our wildlife is perfectly adapted to living with them. Indeed some species require specific species as pollinators or food plants. For example the beautiful holly blue butterfly larvae needs holly and ivy to thrive (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/holly-blue>)
3. Try to set aside a wilder area of your garden as these can be shelter for animals and provide food. For example, nettles are just perfect for the larvae of peacock and small tortoiseshell butterflies to feed on and nooks and crannies may provide a nesting site for a robin. Rotting wood is also a haven for beetles and other insects, as well as fungi.
4. What may look untidy or unsightly may be good for wildlife. We have a lot of alkanet in our alleyway. I am the first to think it is a little invasive and not the prettiest of plants, but it is also great for bees! (<https://www.janeperrone.com/blog/greenalkanet>)
5. There are several plants which make excellent food for pollinators. It is not just about bees though. Many insects provide pollinator services for plants and some pollinators are exclusive to certain species. Take a look at the RHS website to find out more about good pollinator plants (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators>). I can recommend single Dahlias such as the 'Bishop of Auckland' and 'Waltzing Mathilda' for the bees. Sarahraven.com has several unusual varieties to choose from.

6. If your lawn is struggling to look like a bowling green have you thought of creating a wildflower meadow instead? This is especially relevant as climate change means summers are becoming warmer and drier. I am about to convert my Mum's front lawn with a wildflower mix so will keep you posted. Wildflower seeds can be bought in bulk from www.wildflower.co.uk
7. Have you considered planting a tree instead of a parasol to create summer shade? They will cool the environment as well as take carbon out of the atmosphere. Trees can also provide blossom and autumn colour and not all grow to be too large for our small plots.
8. Invest in the future and plant trees that will mature and provide value in your children's or grandchildren's lifetime (or lobby the RBWM or Government to do more of this!)
9. Try to plant some fruit and veg too, as these can support wildlife, such as blackcurrant bushes, raspberry canes and fruit trees, as well as runner beans and Swiss chard, which can also be very decorative. I can recommend the heritage runner bean variety Painted lady with its soft pink and white flowers, which will be at home rambling over other plants.
10. Think about your roofs. Swifts are still to be seen around our skies but are in decline, as they find it more difficult to find nesting sites on the eaves of houses as loft conversions increase and holes are closed up. Think about putting up a nest box in your eaves (<https://www.swift-conservation.org/>)
11. When you use composts in your pots and gardens, use a peat-free compost. Peat is extracted in the UK from peat bogs. However these habitats perform two crucial roles. The first is as a carbon sink. Peatlands cover less than 3% of the Earth's surface but contain roughly twice as much carbon as the World's forests (Source: UN Environment Programme). They are therefore vital in our efforts to minimise climate change, as extracting more will release more carbon and exacerbate global warming. Peat bogs are also unique ecosystems and habitats which contain a large range of plants and animals. Rather like coal, which is peat fossilised over geological time, they take thousands of years to form and so any peat used is not replaced and is depleting the carbon sink and contributing to atmospheric carbon.
12. When you buy plants try to use an independent nursery. Not only do you support local businesses but they are more likely to be more carbon friendly as they do not rely upon large supply chains. (<http://independentplantnurseriesguide.uk/>). You could try Dunkirk Nurseries in Egham (<https://www.dunkirkplantnursery.co.uk>) or Farnham Common Nurseries (<http://www.fcn.co.uk>)