

Do we really need to use pesticides in our gardens?



By gardening organically and encouraging wildlife, you can establish a balance between pests and their natural predators. Both plants and beneficial pests will flourish, and with a healthy food chain in place, the more harmful creatures can be kept at manageable levels. For example, ladybirds feed on aphids, and frogs, toads and birds eat slugs and snails.

Being more wildlife-friendly doesn't mean you have to have a messy garden, but it does mean forsaking the ideal of a perfect lawn and rigidly trimmed borders. Simple changes to your gardening such as planting some native species, allowing seedheads to form and hiding a logpile behind the shed can be very beneficial to wildlife

Start by creating a biodiverse environment to achieve balance. Encourage natural predators such as birds, hoverflies and parasitic wasps. Leave seedheads for birds and insects and provide plenty of nesting areas. Hoverflies and parasitic wasps love cow parsley, dill and fennel flowers.



Some things to try:

Transplant seedlings in early summer, when they are strong enough to resist attack from aphids, which are at their peak in high summer.



Create physical barriers. Use fine netting to cover your crops, install it immediately after planting out young seedlings, before butterflies can lay eggs and aphids have hatched. This prevents trapping caterpillars and pests inside the netting.



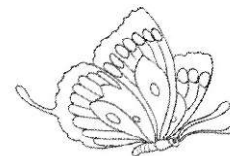
Keep things clean. Good greenhouse hygiene can nip problems in the bud, so sweep up excess compost, keep pots and surfaces clean and undercover areas well ventilated.

Using mulches. Weeds will occupy an area of soil where nothing else is growing. Try light-excluding materials between plants or rows, such as biodegradable plastic, straw, well-rotted compost or low-growing green manures such as clovers. The latter two boost the soil's reserves, and thereby reduce infections transmitted by aphids.

Hand removal of pests and weeds – but only where necessary. Most weeds actually benefit our gardens: protect soil from erosion, add organic matter, attract beneficial insects and, in some cases, their roots accumulate nutrients while loosening soil.

Use biocontrols such as nematodes if practical.

About companion planting



Creating plant communities for mutual benefit is an old gardening tradition. Companion planting isn't just about pest control. By combining plants carefully, plants can help each other in terms of providing nutrients in the soil, offering protection from wind or sun and also, by attracting beneficial pests or acting as a decoy for harmful ones.

Plant combinations to try:

Grow French marigolds among tomatoes. Marigolds emit a strong odour that will repel greenfly and blackfly.

Plant nasturtium with cabbages - they're a magnet for caterpillars that will then leave the cabbages alone.

Garlic planted among roses will ward off aphids.

Plant carrots and leeks together to protect against a number of pests. Leeks repel carrot fly and carrots repel onion fly and leek moth.

Make sure companion plants are planted at the same time as your edible crops to prevent pests from getting a foothold.

Plants to try:

Asparagus - prevents microscopic nematodes from attacking the roots of tomatoes

Chervil - keeps aphids off lettuce

Chives - onion scent wards off aphids from chrysanthemums, sunflowers and tomatoes

Coriander - helps to repel aphids

Dill - attracts aphid eating beneficial insects like hoverflies and predatory wasps

Garlic - deters aphids and is particularly good planted with roses

Tansy - strongly scented plant deters ants

Plants in the pea family - lupins, peas, beans and sweet peas benefit the soil by taking nitrogen from the air and storing it in their roots

Yarrow - this boosts vigour in other plants and accumulates phosphorous, calcium and silica, which can benefit homemade compost when plants are added to the heap. It attracts many beneficial creatures such as hoverflies and ladybirds

Ways to introduce wildlife-friendly features

Choose plants that are more attractive to native wildlife, for example, birds are attracted to berry-bearing plants in winter, such as cotoneasters, holly, pyracantha and skimmia. Also favourites with birds are natives like crab apples, hawthorn, honeysuckle, rowan, and sunflowers.

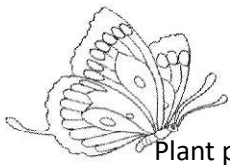
Allow some of your plants to go to seed to provide winter food for seed-eating birds. Seed heads also have an aesthetic bonus, as they provide winter interest in the garden.

Look for alternatives to slug pellets and pesticides or reduce the use of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides - use organic methods of control. Many insecticides kill beneficial species as well as harmful ones.

Use bird-feeders or bird tables to protect birds from cats.

Provide nesting boxes for birds and even bats. Nest boxes are excellent substitutes for the holes in old trees. In many gardens, there may be lots of food, but nowhere to nest.





Plant perennials with broad flower heads to encourage bees into your garden in summer. Avoid too many double flowers that can prevent insects from accessing the nectar.

Avoid using herbicides by hand weeding, applying mulch, using weed-suppressant fabric and planting good ground cover.

Have a water feature - even a simple bowl can encourage frogs and other wildlife which will feed on bugs and snails. Dragonflies will often breed in them, and many birds may use them to drink and bathe in. If you have room for a pond, site it in a sunny position and ensure the sides are gently sloping, so birds can drink and bathe, amphibians can spawn and hedgehogs can escape if they fall in.

Keep a pile of logs in an undisturbed corner of the garden to provide shelter for insects and mammals - if you're lucky a hedgehog or toad may find a home there and feed on all your slugs and snails.

A bundle of hollow stems in a quiet spot that catches the morning sun can be a home for solitary mason bees.

Plants to try:

Viburnum opulus, **Guelder rose** - good autumn colour and white summer flowers, which turn into red berries in autumn, providing a good food source for birds



Echinops ritro, **Globe thistle** - this thistle is a great architectural perennial, with its spherical blue flower heads drying into striking seed heads. The flowers attract bees and butterflies, and birds eat the seeds

Buddleja davidii, **Butterfly bush** - good source of nectar for butterflies

Lonicera periclymenum, **Honeysuckle** - provides nectar for butterflies and moths, which it attracts with its nocturnal scent. Birds also eat the seeds

Calendula officinalis, **Marigold** - nectar rich and also good for companion planting

Primula vulgaris, **Primrose** - the spring flowers provide an early source of nectar in spring, while the leaves are food for butterfly larvae and finches eat the seeds

Hedera helix, **Ivy** - provides shelter for birds, nectar in winter and berries in spring

