

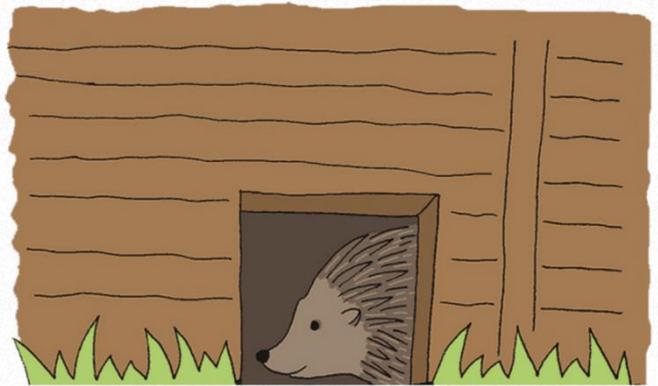


## #TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Connectivity

Think about how you and your outdoor space are connected to your wider community and your surrounding landscape. You can make small changes, have a big impact for wildlife and join with other people to create a real buzz (snuffle and tweet!) in your neighbourhood.

### Contents:

1. Mixed native hedge
2. Rows of trees or shrubs along boundaries
3. Creating a hedgehog highway
4. Dry stone walls
5. Patches or strips of lawn or grass left to grow long
6. Other things to think about
7. Helping others grow wilder
8. Improving your local area for wildlife



## What Comes Naturally

Get to know the habitats surrounding your garden/outdoor space and further afield. This will help you decide what kind of wildlife you can support and who you may attract as a visitor. Gardens can provide valuable food and refuge for wildlife suffering from habitat destruction and your garden could be a much-needed missing link in a disconnected landscape.

### 1. Mixed native hedge along boundaries

Rather than, (or in addition to) your fence you could plant a lovely hedge to connect your garden to your neighbour's garden or the wider habitat. See [#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Shelter](#). These hedges provide a fabulous place for birds to nest and roost, as well as providing vital habitat corridors for mammals such as hedgehogs and mice.

### 2. Rows of trees or shrubs

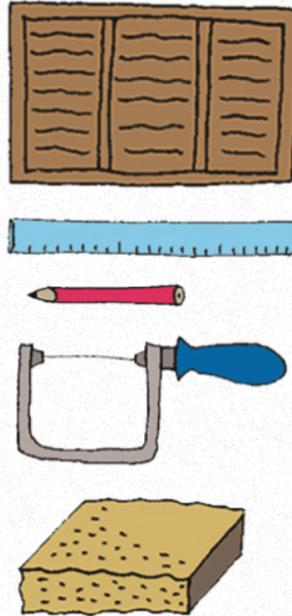
Especially if you have a **nearby woodland** and you have the space, then try creating a woodland edge habitat in your garden or community green space by planting some small trees or shrubs with shade loving plants and wildflowers below them. Make sure you have lots of deadwood and leaf litter in this area to complete the habitat. See [#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Shelter](#).



### 3. Creating a hedgehog highway

Make sure your garden has small gaps in the surrounding fences and walls allows hedgehogs and other small mammals to pop in and roam freely.

A hedgehog roams on average 2km each night and needs a gap of 13cm by 13cm (5") to get in out of your garden. You can cut a hole in a fence or dig a tunnel under it, ask your neighbours to join in and create a hedgehog highway.



#### You will need:

A fence panel

Ruler

Pencil

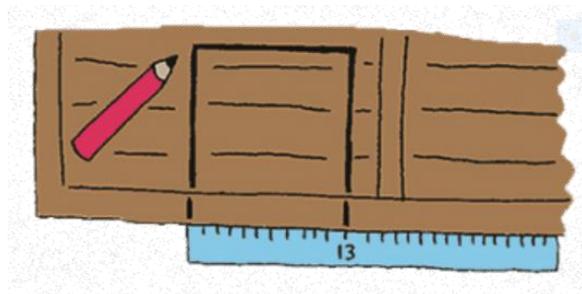
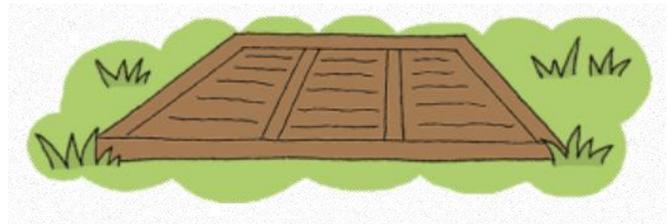
Coping saw

Sandpaper

Your neighbours' cooperation! Keep an eye out for neighbours doing work on their gardens, or using fencing contractors - this is the perfect opportunity to get a hedgehog hole put in!

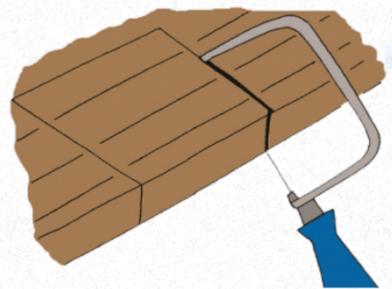
#### Step 1:

If your neighbour is happy, remove a fence panel. The other option is to leave the fence up and use a pad saw or 'jab saw' instead of a coping saw.



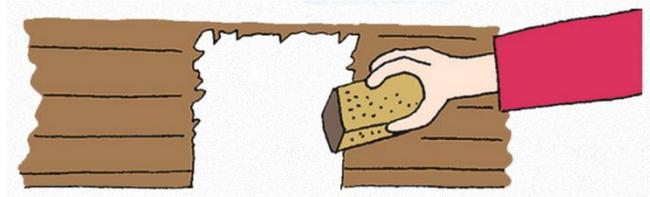
#### Step 2:

Measure and mark a 13cm x 13cm hole at the bottom of the panel.



#### Step 3:

Using the coping saw, cut out the marked hole.



#### Step 4:

If there are very rough edges, use sandpaper to smooth them down.

#### Step 5:

Put your fence panel back, your hedgehog highway is now open for business! It's a good idea to label your hedgehog highway to ensure it is not blocked by anyone accidentally.



## 4. Dry stone wall

A dry stone wall is a great alternative to a fence and acts as a wildlife corridor. Lichen, mosses, and ferns grow on and between the rocks; mice, stoats and voles hide in the gaps; bees visit the nectar-giving flowers that can live in cracks and frogs, toads, and slow-worms shelter in damp crevices.

You may not be able to have a wildlife pond, but you can still provide a space for amphibians from nearby ponds to live. Frogs and newts will travel up to 500 metres from a pond, toads will travel up to 5000 metres! Dry stone walls, piles of stone and undisturbed log piles and plenty of insulating garden waste or leaf litter will provide damp conditions for creatures to spend a hot summer or a cold winter. People can be unhappy with a shady part of their garden, but by thinking about the wildlife that needs shade you can transform this space into a perfect wildlife haven.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-mini-stone-wall>

## 5. Patches or strips of lawn or grass left to grow long

Just leaving a bit of your lawn to grow can make such a difference to improve your garden for wild visitors. The long grass provides shelter for many insects and this in turn provides food for more wildlife.

Long grass is one of the rarest habitats in our well-tended gardens, yet it's incredibly beneficial for wildlife.

### When you stop mowing you allow:

- Different species of plants to thrive.
- More food for pollinators.
- A habitat for insects and their larvae.
- Shelter and food for birds, small mammals, and amphibians.

## Leave your garden wild



Take a day off today and do nothing! Leave a wild spot in your garden by not mowing the lawn, or not weeding the paving – nature will love it!



[www.wildlifewatch.org.uk](http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk)



## Maintaining your wild patch.

There are a few different tactics you can adopt when creating a wilder grass area; the size of your garden and how relaxed you're able to be about leaving the mower alone for long periods will both be factors in choosing the best option for you!



At its simplest, you can **choose an area of grass and just leave it to grow** – then wait to see what arrives. Essentially, the less pristine our lawns are, the more promising they are for wildlife! Mowing a perimeter around and/or a path through your long grass means that you can navigate it without getting wet legs and makes it obvious that the area is being managed deliberately, rather than forgotten.

Try **relaxing and altering your mowing habits**. If you stop mowing your whole lawn or part of it, for a month or a season, you can create a busy wildlife habitat. If possible, try to leave some grass uncut throughout the year; simply varying the areas left on a three-year rotation to avoid the development of coarser grass and scrub.

If you just have a small area of grass, you may feel that a wilder grass area is impossible as it will prevent you enjoying use your lawn in summer and early autumn. But maybe you could reduce or stop mowing from early August to **allow the grass to grow over winter** avoiding cutting again until April or May, when you want to start using the lawn again. Leaving your grass long over winter provides shelter for hibernating insects and a place for invertebrate eggs and pupae to overwinter. Having access to emerging insects which have spent the winter as an egg or pupa in the long grass will help birds to build energy and fat reserves in early spring, ahead of the breeding season.

## Mowing Regimes.

Whenever you mow it's important to **rake off and remove cuttings** to prevent nutrients returning to the soil – nutrient-rich soil encourages rank grasses and pernicious plants such as docks, which can outcompete the more delicate grasses and wildflowers that you're trying to establish.

Cut back the majority of your wild area at **the end of summer** once any flowers have gone to seed (August to September during a sunny spell). Make sure you leave the cuttings for a few days to drop any flower seeds back into your wild patch.

**During the first year**, we'd recommend cutting and raking your wilder grass area back to 5-7 cm around 4 times during the growing season. After this, a couple of cuts a year should be enough - once in August and then again in early autumn.

**Be careful when you do mow** - small mammals, amphibians and reptiles may be hiding in the grass. Some birds nest in larger meadows, so don't mow until after the beginning of August.

## Top tips:

- You can control any assertive plants that have found their way in, like thistles, nettles and docks, by hand-weeding or reduce their spread by hand cutting them back before they go to seed.



- Explore locally to find out what wildflowers and grasses flourish and replicate these in your garden. Different plants like different soil and rock types and with such a range of habitats in Yorkshire it is worthwhile planting for hyperlocal success.
- Use an app like PlantNet or iNaturalist to identify local plants and chat to local botanists about wildflowers that are in decline that you could grow in your garden.
- Think about what is happening seasonally in your area, if local meadows and grassland are cut in July then help pollinators by growing plants that flower from July onwards. Your long grass can help the wildlife that is dislocated.
- If you want to develop a meadow, scarify (create some patches of bare soil with a rake or spade) the ground after autumn mowing, then sow a mix of wild grass and wildflower seed. Include yellow rattle seed, to help suppress rank grasses and give more delicate grasses and wildflowers space to thrive.
- Nature thrives on irregularity - the rises and hollows in your lawn may drive you to distraction but try to embrace them as they provide a 'micro-climate' for a range of plants and minibeasts.
- If you have a tree in your lawn, you could leave a border of grass to grow around it. Introduce some bulbs around it - native daffodils, bluebells, crocuses, snake's head fritillaries and snowdrops could all work well in this kind of setting.

## 6. Other things to think about ...

### Feeding birds:

Feeding birds is a perfect way to support bird populations in decline through loss of habitat. See [#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Food](#). If you are about to start feeding birds or thinking about adjusting the type of food you supply then you might want to consider a few factors, depending on where you live. For most people, especially if you are living in an urban or semi-urban area then none of this applies, so feed on! However, some bird species such as willow tit and marsh tits are in huge decline and by intervening with feeders you can impact on their local populations by giving other birds, such as blue tits and great tits, an advantage. Here are some things to think about if you live in a rural or suburban area or if you live near a woodland or a nature reserve:

- **Do some research about local bird populations**, talk to a local bird watcher about what birds are living near you and find out if you have any local birds on the Birds of Conservation Concern list.
- If you are concerned that you are missing out supporting some of your local birds, then **reduce the amount of peanuts and try out different seeds**.
- Some less confident birds may prefer a small scattering of seeds on the ground so **test some different ways of feeding and see if you attract different birds**.
- If you have the space then **introduce plants and features to encourage birds naturally**: providing wild berries, letting wild grasses go to seed, planting teasel and knapweed, an untidy tangle with deadwood, leaf litter, access to soil and plant for caterpillar abundance. In this way you can attract birds without having to constantly fill and clean your feeders and when you go on holiday you don't have to worry about your visitors going hungry.



If you are thinking about putting up a new bird box, then have a think about what species of bird you want to help in your local area. If you do not need to encourage blue tits and great tits locally then put-up boxes suitable for other birds **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Shelter.**

If you live near land that is grazed, you can help swifts, swallows, and house martins by putting up special boxes for swifts or you can make a boggy or muddy area for swallows and house martins to collect mud for their nests.

### Butterflies and moths:

Yorkshire has such a variety of landscapes and by finding out whether you may get some rarer butterflies or moths visiting, will help you think about what types of plants you need to provide for caterpillars and as a nectar source. Be ambitious about what visitors you may get as migrating butterflies and moths may suddenly make an appearance and be in desperate need of a pitstop on a long journey. See **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Food.**

### Ponds:

If you live near ponds or wetlands that support **dragonflies**, then you can make their populations stronger and more resilient to drought by having your own wildlife pond. See **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Water.**

### Bats:

If you have **bats living nearby**, then try to minimise your outdoor lighting to support your local bats.



Image credit: Jo Rawson

- Have essential lights on a sensor rather than constantly on (saves on electricity too!)
- Dim or switch lights off at dusk and dawn.
- Use warm long-wavelength lights and avoid blue-white short wavelength lights. Pick lighting that is less than a 3000K colour temperature.

## 7. Helping others grow wilder

**Chatting to your neighbours:** Talking about what you are doing in your garden for wildlife can inspire other people to try new things out and together you can have even more of an impact for local wildlife.

### Ideas for things that you can collaborate on:

- Creating a wild border on a shared boundary
- Planting a continuous hedge
- Having a shared undisturbed corner or tangle
- When you stop mowing you create:
- Different species of plants



- More food for pollinators
- A habitat for insects and their larvae
- Shelter and food for birds, small mammals and amphibians

Having conversations about your garden is a great way to find out what types of plants might flourish on your specific soil-type and swap cuttings and seeds. Sharing stories about garden visitors and inhabitants spurs people on to adapt their gardens accordingly. With enough enthusiasm you may be able to **start a formal or informal wildlife gardening group**.

**Finding local experts:** This can be a good way of improving your understanding your local habitat. Joining in a volunteering event at a local nature reserve gives you an opportunity to find other people locally who are also interested in wildlife and may have some good tips for you.

<https://www.ywt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer>

**Attending events is a great way to increase your knowledge of local wildlife to help you to understand what to grow and who may visit your garden or green space.**

<https://www.ywt.org.uk/our-events>

## 8. Improving your local area for wildlife

**Joining a local community group:** This is a great way of finding people who are enthusiastic about their local area. This group may be already interested in nature, and you can find like-minded people, or you can be an advocate for local wildlife and inspire more people to start thinking about nature recovery in your community.

Discovering **what is already happening** is essential to making the most from your efforts. Visit your local library, community hub, keep an eye on noticeboards and do a search for local groups on social media. Your local councillor should be able to tell you about groups and opportunities in your community. Don't be put off if you think you haven't got much time or knowledge to contribute, a small amount of participation makes a network stronger. Knowing that other people care and are trying to make a difference helps motivate everyone along and reassures people that change is possible.

**For more information on how to take action in your community explore our #TeamWilder Community Toolkits, they offer a range of support with setting up a community group, getting your voice heard and working with others.**

*This toolkit has been created with credit to The Wildlife Trusts.*

