



#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Management

There are all sorts of things that you can do to make your garden or community green space wildlife friendly, some of them are positive, sustainable lifestyle choices and some of them save you time as well as make your gardening experience more enjoyable and fulfilling. So read on to get some advice and experiment with different ways of managing your outdoor space.

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1. Going peat free

Peat free compost and hanging basket liners.

Peat has been a major ingredient of the compost used in gardening for many years. This peat is dug out of wild places, damaging some of the last remaining peatlands in both the UK and overseas in places like Eastern Europe. This process also releases carbon into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change. Sadly, more than 94% of the UK's lowland peat bogs have been destroyed or damaged, and a wealth of wildlife has disappeared along with it. This vital habitat isn't easily replaced, see our Yorkshire Peat Project and the amazing work they are doing to restore Yorkshire's peatlands. <https://www.yppartnership.org.uk/>

Peat-free growing media, including compost and soil conditioners are commonly available and it is essential that all wildlife gardeners make the move to be peat-free.

Top tips on going peat free.

1. **Check all purchases:** Be watchful for ways in which you may accidentally be depleting peatlands through your gardening choices. Avoid hanging basket liners maybe made of sphagnum moss (a peatland plant). Make sure all the plants you buy are grown in peat free compost. Look out for pots and pellets made from peat or sphagnum moss and avoid using them.
2. **Experiment with different alternatives:** Making the switch from peat is not always straightforward as peat free compost will not function in the same way that your old peat-based product did.
 - To start small seeds off look for specific peat free seedling compost or riddle/sieve your compost to get rid of any larger material in your compost.



- Your peat free compost will require a new approach to watering. Peat-free compost can be very free-draining, so watering little and often is key. Your plants may look dry at the top or may look a dark colour and seem wet, but they may not be! Check your water levels in your pots by sticking your finger in to feel for water all the way down and lift pots up to feel their weight.
- Your seedlings and potted plants may need a bit of liquid food earlier than they used to so check your compost instructions to see how many weeks of food your plant has with your new compost.
- Committed peat free gardeners have done lots of trials with different composts and published them online so read up on their favourites and tips to using them successfully. Some peat free composts are rated better for growing than peat composts, when you know how to work with them, so don't see the move as being negative for your gardening success.
- Use your own compost that you have made in your garden, just be aware that some of your homemade compost may need diluting with soil or bought compost before use for starting seeds.

3. Be vocal: If you have found a peat free compost that works for you then tell your local retailer and encourage them to stock it. Help demonstrate consumer demand for peat free products by asking your local retailer what's available.

If you cannot find what you want locally then why not team up with some neighbours, community gardeners or allotment friends and buy a pallet of compost to share straight from the supplier – save money, build friendships, and get the product that is right for you!

4. Support retailers that are committed to being peat free: Some garden centres are ahead of the game and are already peat free. Some compost retailers only make peat free compost (whereas others sell varieties of peat and peat free compost). Show your support by using these shops and suppliers, pocket-power is a great way to enact change.

[Peat-free compost: what is peat and how to use it - Which?](#)

2. Compost areas, compost bins and wormeries

Very few of us manage to garden without creating waste – weeding, mowing grass, pruning, and clipping all create green or brown waste and autumn always requires a bit of waste management!

Even less of us manage to not have some food waste from our kitchens, vegetable peelings, food that has gone past its best and leftovers (especially when you have fussy eaters!)

Some startling statistics!

Globally, agriculture is responsible for a third of our greenhouse emissions. 30% of the food we produce is wasted (1.8 billion tonnes globally). If we stopped wasting food, we would eliminate 8% of our emissions. It is estimated that in Europe households are responsible for 53% of all food waste!

The good news is that processing the garden and food waste, and this is beneficial for your garden, its wild inhabitants, and visitors. This organic waste can provide nutrients for your garden, will improve your soil, and reduce the need for buying compost and fertilisers. Although your local council may collect your green and brown waste it is better for your soil and therefore for your local wildlife to keep it in your garden.



How to get started

All you need for a successful compost heap is waste, air and water! A simple heap covered with old carpet or plastic is just as effective as a 'bin'. The only advantage of a container is they look tidier and can be easier to manage. Try to pick a shady spot to keep things moist, and water any dry ingredients you may be adding.

What to put where?

When deciding what to compost then you can ask a few questions:

Is it organic matter? If so, then you can probably compost it (animal bones will take a while and it is best not to try and compost your dog or cat poop). The roots of dock, thistle, dandelion, couch grass and other pernicious weeds may be better dealt with in other ways (read the section on making liquid feeds). Think about hidden plastics e.g. in the glue of tea bags. Biodegradable plastics are not always suitable for home composting – only compost plastic if it has a seedling symbol on.

Is it going to grow again? When you add seeds to your compost bin from weeds or vegetables they may grow again if you do not get your compost hot enough. Similarly, roots may just stay dormant in your compost waiting for an opportunity to regrow. When you are composting your garden waste be aware of these survivors.

Is it going to attract rats? If so, then read on as you could add it to a wormery or ferment it with a bokashi bin instead of putting it in your compost pile or heap.

How to make simple compost



You will need

- A compost bin, with a lid*
- A well-drained, easy to access area
- Green compostable ingredients
- Brown materials, like straw and scrunched-up paper
- A gardening fork



Compost worms are brilliant recyclers so put them to use on your green waste. The finished compost will enrich your garden soil, benefiting even more earthworms! This rich soil also boosts flowers, veggies and other plants.

1 Carefully make holes in the base of your bin if it doesn't have any. Then place it on or close to bare soil to let worms wiggle in.



2 Start putting stuff in... mix brown materials, like straw and paper, with nitrogen-rich ones like veggies and tea bags.



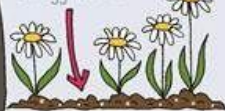
Check out the worms that have moved in!



3 Stick a fork in and turn over the contents of the bin (ideally once a month) to let more air in. The more you turn it, the quicker you make compost.

4 It can take from six months to two years, but when it's ready you'll find rich, dark, fabulous compost. Use it!

Don't worry if there are lumps, bumps and bits of eggshells.



tea leaves



raw fruit and veg peelings



grass cuttings



straw



scrunched newspaper



soft prunings & dead plants



coffee grounds



woody stems



cooked food scraps



cat or dog poo



meat or bones



weed seedheads



perennial weed roots



diseased plants

www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk *An old recycling tub or a smaller ready-made compost bin (recycled plastic ones are available) could save space.



What to put in your compost bin

- Grass cuttings and dead leaves.
- Fruit and vegetable scraps and peel.
- Plain cardboard (not the glossy cereal box kind).
- Old cut flowers and bedding plants.
- Prunings and dead plants.
- Coffee grounds.
- Tea bags (check your teabags don't contain plastic first!).
- Pet droppings from any healthy veg-eating pets, including gerbils, rabbits, hamsters and birds, along with any bedding made from natural material or newspaper.
- Eggshells – these help to keep the heap from smelling.
- Newspapers or shredded paper can help to soak up excess moisture in a heap.

What not to compost in a bin

- Cooked food (this can be composted in a wormery)
- Coal ash
- Meat and fish (this can be composted in a Bokashi bin)
- Bones
- Cat litter
- Dog Poo
- Nappies or human poo
- Glossy paper or card
- Weeds (try making some liquid feed)
- Diseased plants

A compost heap.

Having a pile of garden waste in a corner of your garden throughout the spring and summer is both a café and shelter for visiting and resident wildlife.

For much of your garden waste it will take about a year to turn into compost - if you use lots of leaves and hardy cuttings then this can take a longer time so you can have two piles – one quick and one slow. If you have lots of leaves then having a slow pile that is just for leaves, stalks and stems is a good idea and a perfect place for animals looking for a place to hibernate or nest over winter. If you have the room and the enthusiasm you can even have a hot and a cold pile, you can have a lot of fun trying to get your compost heap hot enough. Getting the right balance of green and brown materials, the right amount of moisture and oxygen are all key to creating heat. The hot compost will not only be ready to use quicker, but you also kill unwanted seeds, harmful bacteria, and pathogens.

Remember! Be careful when you turn or fork your compost, especially in winter, as there may be animals hiding or hibernating in there – everything from smooth newts to hedgehogs!

A compost bin.

A closed bin can be useful to contain your compost, it saves space, blocks out light and too much rain and so might suit your needs. You can create some great compost from these and is still good shelter and a habitat for lots of bugs.

Putting uncooked kitchen waste in these bins or in your heap can be fine – depending on where you live and how many rats are looking for a new home! Having ratty compost, especially if you have children helping, or you are growing vegetables, isn't great and so you can use this bin just as a garden waste bin and process food waste in other ways.



A wormery.

Buying or making your own wormery is a great way of turning your kitchen waste into amazing compost. You will need to buy some tiger or compost worms or borrow some from a friend's wormery. The resulting compost can be dug into your garden as super food and the liquid produced - worm wee - diluted to feed plants. You can put cooked food into your wormery (not dairy, fish or meat) as well as raw vegetables and green garden waste. Having it as an addition to a compost pile or bin is a great way of processing things that are not working in your bin and worms are very easy pets to look after!

Bokashi bin.

Going one step further (and a very satisfying step!) you can buy or make your own bokashi bin. You can put in all kitchen waste (including dairy, fish and meat), it is smell free so perfect if you have a small garden! And within two weeks you have some pickled materials that you can dig into your garden or add to your compost bin – the rats are no longer interested, and the fermented waste will be broken down into soil very fast. <https://www.verticalveg.org.uk/diy-bokashi-bin/>

Top tips!

- Using lots of composting systems together maximises the benefits for your garden.
- Although not all options are possible, depending on the size of your garden, collaborating with neighbours is a good way to solve this problem.
- If you have a friend or neighbour who is already successfully composting then ask them for a spade full of their compost to activate your pile

<https://oldworldgardenfarms.com/2022/06/16/compost-pile-get-hot/>

<https://laidbackgardener.blog/2018/08/26/how-to-kill-weed-seeds-in-compost/>

3. Going organic

No pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or slug pellets:

Gardening organically is best for wildlife in your garden and for the planet as a whole. Here are some ideas to get rid of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilisers from your garden.

Home-made plant feeds:

Although you can buy **organic fertilisers** (e.g. seaweed or chicken pellets, blood fish and bone) why not make your own 'weed tea' as food for your plants! Not only is it free but you can also deal with some of the garden waste that you don't want to put in your compost bin.

Comfrey and nettles are not only great plants for wildlife, but they also make excellent liquid fertilisers. The 'weed tea' is smelly so try and make it in a closed container. Place stones on top of the leaves to weigh them down. Breaking plant matter into smaller pieces (with gloves on) means that the tea will be ready to use quicker.

Nettle tea recipe: put 1 kg of nettles in 10 litres of water and leave for two weeks, dilute to 1 part tea to 10 parts water before using. The tea is particularly good for leaf growth.

Comfrey tea recipe: harvest before or after it flowers (when the bees are visiting leave it for them!). Put a 1kg of leaves and stem in 15 litres of water and leave for six weeks. The tea can be used undiluted and is great for flowering and fruiting plants.



Top tip!

Don't stop at nettles and comfrey, experiment with all sorts of garden weed leaves!

You can even try making a tea with roots that you do not want to put in your compost heap: dandelion roots, dock roots, couch grass, thistle and even bind weed! Cover them with water, put a lid on to stop the roots growing and leave them to rot down. As a rule, dilute the 'tea' until it looks like weak black tea before using it as feed.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/garden-jobs/fertilisers>

Problematic visitors:

When you have a problem with a particular garden visitor the best way forward is to look for nature's own solution, a serious infestation is sometimes a sign that something is out of balance and often you can encourage or introduce natural predators into your garden. This is **THE long term and sustainable solution** and, the one to aim for. In the short term, little flies can be sprayed with diluted washing up liquid and carefully rubbed off but in the long-term ladybirds and hoverfly larvae will do the job much better!

People often have a problem with snails and slugs! These molluscs are great food for wildlife in your garden, hedgehogs, foxes, badgers, shrews, frogs, toads, lizards, thrushes, blackbirds, robins, starlings, gulls, jays, magpies, owls, ground beetles, centipedes and harvestmen will all eat them! One of the issues is that although many of these predators are in serious decline, snails and slugs are thriving.

Lots of wildlife interventions in our other guides can be helpful here: making sure hedgehogs can access your garden, having a pond suitable for amphibians or rockery or stone area for neighbouring frogs and toads to live and providing a habitat suitable for birds.

If slugs are a problem for you today, and you have yet to have frogs and hedgehogs moving in, here are some ideas to try out:

- Go out with a torch at dusk and collect slugs and snails for relocation.
- Putting a piece of damp cardboard down with a stone to stop it blowing away provides a nice habitat for easy collecting.
- Grow some sacrificial plants near the plants that you want to protect – some lettuce, cabbage or french marigolds can be very appealing.
- Make sure your plants are healthy and strong, especially when they are young, because slugs will always eat weak plants first.
- Try wool slug pellets, these will biodegrade and improve your soil.

Another top tip!

Not convinced about growing lots of different plants together in your vegetable patch? It is very hard to break the tradition of rows and beds full of the same plant! Why not experiment with one or two beds and compare the results? Did you get less pests? Did you need to water less? Were the plants healthier? Did you get more wild visitors? You may see some changes that will encourage you to experiment more, then you are well on the way to changing your gardening habits!

<https://greenecofriend.co.uk/wildlife-friendly-alternatives-to-slug-pellets/>

<https://www.slughelp.com/promote-biodiversity-prevent-garden-pests-like-slugs/>



Companion planting:

Companion planting works in different ways. Many companion plants have a strong scent that confuses pests looking for a particular plant to lay its eggs on.

Planting nectar rich flowers encourages beneficial insects like hoverflies. Hoverfly larvae will eat aphids, scale bugs and mites!

Mixing your planting up will confuse flying insects who are looking for a secure food source for their larvae, if they land several times and keep finding cabbages then they know to lay their eggs but if when they land, they find unsuitable plants then they will try elsewhere. Planting plants that support each other nutritionally will strengthen your plants and make them less susceptible to damage from pests.

Top tips!

- Make yourself a planting plan and make sure that everything you are growing has enough room – don't try and squeeze your companion in between your plants as they may out compete it!
- Try not to grow a monoculture, instead grow a biodiverse bed of herbs, flowers and vegetables all together.

Visit <https://www.saga.co.uk/magazine/home-garden/gardening/advice-tips/companion-planting-guide> for more information about companion planting.

Weed control and soil care:

Wildlife gardeners know the importance of 'weeds' in their garden ... but sometimes a plant is just in the wrong place, and this is a problem. As much as we all want a patch of nettles for their value for insects, they are generally not welcome in your seating area! Some wild warrior plants can also be very dominant and shade out or out-compete more delicate plants.

Your soil is an ecosystem and habitat all of its own and so constantly digging it over and upsetting its balance to get rid of weeds is not ideal.

Unless you have a serious problem with a non-native invasive plant that cannot be treated in any other way, wildlife gardeners should avoid all weed killers. They are very difficult to use to target a problem and will end up killing other plants and harming your soil. They can also wash into the water and poison wildlife in ponds and other water bodies.

Luckily there are great things you can do to control your weeds and look after your soil and many of these things make for lighter gardening work!

Organic mulches:

Mulching around your plants not only keeps many weeds from germinating but also protects your soil from drying out. Less weeding and less watering – win, win!

- **Leaf mould** – if you haven't got time to wait two years for your leaves to turn into compost then just add them partially rotted to your garden as a mulch.
- **Woodchip** – this can be better if you have time to let it rot down a bit too as it can steal nitrogen from your garden.



- **Grass clippings** – just make sure that there are no grass seeds in the clippings! If there are then add them to your hot compost bin instead.
- **Straw** – especially good for strawberries.
- **Prunings** – just like with the woodchip leave these for a while to break down before applying.
- **Compost** – a great way to use up your homemade compost, you can mix it with compost from old spent pots too.
- **Wood ash** – use around fruit bushes and trees for food.
- **Rhubarb leaves** – cut a slit and place around the bottom of plants when you harvest your rhubarb stalks.
- **Cardboard** – only use brown cardboard with tape and glue removed, cover the cardboard with another mulch to keep it in place and to help it rot down.
- **Coffee sacks** – cut a section and use like the rhubarb leaf – make sure you only use natural fabric as lots of fabric contains plastic.
- **Experiment with what you have available locally** ... sheep wool, bracken, sawdust, coffee grounds, neighbours grass clippings.

Top tip!

You could try the **cut and drop** method – another labour-saving technique! When you cut a plant, just leave its leaves where you cut them. It saves lots of trips to the compost bin, it means that the soil becomes less depleted because you are adding the nutrients that the plant used straight back to the soil, and it is a great way of mulching!

[Mulches and mulching / RHS Gardening](#)

4. Wildflower lawns

By changing your mowing habits your lawn could provide some colour and nectar for your garden. A wildflower lawn requires little effort and the rewards for pollinators and insects are huge. Whereas a nectar rich flower bed may require additional water and feeding, wildflowers are survivors and need little help from you to flourish. By reducing the frequency of your mowing or changing the setting on your mower to allow for a longer lawn you can encourage lots of different flowers to flourish.

See our **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Connectivity** for more information about changing your mowing habits for wildlife.

Dandelions, daisies, and buttercups are three wildflowers that often stand out in a lawn, not only do they grab your attention, but they also attract many pollinators and insects. Dandelions are a valuable source of early nectar; daisies are plentiful in pollen and nectar for bees and buttercups are popular with lots of insects.

Daisies, bugle, selfheal, dog violets and clover grow low to the ground and will tolerate some mowing. **Forget-me-nots** will like a shadier area. **Cowslips** flower in early spring and **germander speedwell** blooms in April. **Yarrow, plantain and sheep's sorrel** all need a break in mowing to set their flowers on taller stems.



Top tips!

- You can dig your lawn up and reseed with a mix of wildflowers and wild grasses **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Food** but many flowers will appear naturally with less cutting. If you want to encourage more diversity then add some wildflower seed into bare patches, make some bare patches with a hand fork and add seed, or add small plants within your lawn. Try snakes head fritillary, cowslip, field poppy, yellow rattle, ox-eye daisy & red clover.
- Watching what comes up naturally can be a great way to improve your plant ID skills. Many of these plants also have medicinal properties and a rich folklore to investigate.

How to make seed bombs



You will need:

- Meadow flower seeds or seeds collected from the garden
- Peat-free compost
- Water
- Powdered clay (from craft shops - use clay soil if you can't find any)
- Mixing bowl

1 In a bowl, mix together 1 cup of seeds with 5 cups of compost and 2-3 cups of clay powder.

2 Slowly mix in water with your hands until everything sticks together, then roll mixture into firm balls.

3

4 Now for the fun bit - plant by throwing your seed bombs at bare parts of the garden!

Illustration: Corinne Weick © Copyright Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts 2015

www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

Not convinced that you want to give up your whole lawn just yet? **Try these ideas out instead:**

- Join in with **No Mow May**
- **Leave the border** of your lawn unmown
- Just **mow a pathway** short so you can get around your garden
- Create **some islands of long grass** and **wildflowers** as a feature
- **Mow your lawn in terraces**, a short section for sitting, a medium section for low standing plants and a long wild section to admire from a distance
- **Plant some crocus bulbs under your lawn** for some early nectar for winter-weary bees
- **Only mow your lawn when you want to use it** and leave it long over winter



5. More ways to manage your garden

Be less tidy in Autumn: Leave stems and seed heads standing for the winter for little animals to crawl into and spend the winter. Leave all your collected leaves in a quiet corner for a winter shelter.

Green manuring: Hardy weeds can get established over autumn and winter and when spring comes they are very settled in. Rather than leave a whole bed of bare soil all winter, plant it with some green manure. It stops the soil from being washed away, crowds out unwanted weeds and improves the soil structure.

Green roof: Look for opportunities to increase space for nature, especially if you don't have much outdoor space. Consider a green roof for a shed or out-building. [Green roofs / RHS Gardening](#)

Connect with others: Find some people who are also gardening nearby and swop seeds and cuttings, building communities of gardeners gives you a chance to shout about your wildlife successes and encourage others to try new things.

Finding space for you: Make sure you have space for yourself and people in your garden so that you can enjoy your wildlife rich garden. Set yourself up observation stations so you can see who is visiting your garden. Comfortable seating means you can stay still longer, try and make sure you have a good view of lots of your garden features (bird feeders, bird boxes, bee hotels, butterfly gardens, ponds). Try putting up cameras at night to observe the night-time goings on!

Recycling and reducing plastic use: Think about the materials that you use in your garden, where they come from and where they are going. Can you go plastic free in your garden? Consider phasing out plastic pots and planters by not buying any new ones. There are good alternatives to plastic plant tags and plant ties. You can even rinse out your plastic compost bags and recycle them at supermarkets. Could you be creative about your planters and use things that you would have thrown away? It is a great way of demonstrating to people your commitment to the planet through your gardening.



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

