

## How to: Improve a balcony or window box for wildlife



Photo: Timothy Vollmer via Wikimedia Commons



Photo: W.Carter via Wikimedia Commons



Photo: FreCha, via Wikimedia Commons

*Balconies and window boxes should not be overlooked as places for wildlife. They can provide sources of food, shelter and water for birds and pollinating insects. Pots, planters and hanging baskets all provide easy ways to incorporate plants into your space. Window boxes, either on window ledges or balcony railings can also be very useful. You can put in bird feeders, which are a way to attract birds while taking up very little space.*

**Target species:** Balconies can be made attractive to many different types of pollinating insects, such as bees, butterflies, moths and beetles, as well as many bird species. It is all about finding out what will work best in your space! It will be important to decide which target species you want to encourage and organise your space according to this. A good place to start would be looking at the WLGf How-to guides for specific animals (see below).

### How to do it

- Your balcony is precious outdoor space for you and your family, so think and discuss what space you can spare, and the best ways to make it attractive for you as well as wildlife.
- It will be important to decide which target species you want to encourage and organise your limited space accordingly.
- Look at our WLGf “How to” guides for bees and pollinators, butterflies and birds, and decide what features you want.
- Plants can be set in individual pots or planters, generally they do best in larger containers. Try to provide a mixture of plants which attract bees and butterflies. Small fruit trees can be grown in tubs and are a magnet for bees, as well as more compact plants like dead-nettles, marigolds and salvias, which can fit well in small pots or hanging baskets. Ice plant and marjoram attract butterflies. Heathers, lavenders and verbenas are particularly attractive to butterflies and bees.
- If you have railings, they will look good if you can train climbers such as ivy, clematis and honeysuckle to provide nectar and pollen for pollinators while in flower and food for birds while they fruit or go to seed. Sweet peas are a good annual climber for a small place.
- Dense herbs such as lavender, thyme, rosemary, mint and marjoram provide food and shelter for pollinators. Herbs are usually tough and compact, so growing a variety of herbs is a great way to attract pollinators to a very small space such as a window box.
- Climbing plants save space and provide shelter for animals on your balcony. Honeysuckle, clematis and ivy provide food and shelter for pollinators and birds.
- You can put in several bird feeders with different food types. With the door to the balcony closed, you can watch them close-up without disturbing them
- Put in a small bee hotel – see our “How to” guide.

- A source of water will encourage birds and honey bees. Birds use water for drinking and bathing, and honey bees need water for air conditioning their hive. Why not follow the advice in our How to: [Make a pond in a pot](#). Alternatively, fill one side of a dish with some stones, and add water until it reaches most of the height of the stones. The stones give somewhere for bees to sit on while they drink, and the half of the dish with only water in will give somewhere for birds to bathe.

### How easy is it to do?

Easy/moderate. Planting up window boxes and planters is very easy, although establishing climbing plants can be a little more difficult. Some amount of DIY may be needed to ensure all planters are safely secured.

**How much will it cost?** This will largely depend on how many planters and plants you buy, although many of these steps can be achieved cheaply. Herb plants can be bought under £5 in most garden centres. Window boxes vary in price depending on the size, material and type of structure you are looking for, largely from £5 up to around £40. Other suitable planters will usually vary from £5 to £15, or if you are handy and have tools you could make them yourself.

### How effective is it for the target species?

Effective. Balconies can act as a 'green stepping-stone' for pollinators, providing vital sources of nectar and pollen, especially in urban areas. They are also free from cats (unless you have one?)

### Golden rules – what the science tells us

- Different plants help wildlife in different seasons, so look at our seasonal How to guides
- Make sure to include some evergreen plants which continue to provide shelter throughout the winter.
- While you could try putting up a nest box, birds don't like continual disturbance, so think how much peace and quiet you can provide.
- A balcony on a very high-rise building may be too high for many insects, so you might want to concentrate on helping birds.

### What to look for?

The most important thing with making your balcony wildlife friendly is to have a trial-and-error process of seeing what works. Depending on how high up you are and what direction your balcony or window box faces, you will get quite different species visiting. It is therefore worth testing out what works for you.

### Things to be aware of

- One of the most important factors is to check the rules on window boxes and balconies that apply to your building before you start to make any of these changes, e.g weight restrictions and fire safety.
- Any features such as pots, boxes and feeders must be very safely secured to the balcony or window ledge, to ensure they will not fall and will not blow away in the wind.
- Generally, relying on rain alone will not be enough to water your plants. It is useful to get into a regular watering regime and have someone come over and water your plants while you are away.
- If using any kind of bird feeder or bird table, make sure that you clean it regularly, see our "How to" guide on birds

### Further information

How to: Improve your garden for [bees & other pollinators](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_improve\\_pollinators.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_improve_pollinators.pdf)

How to: Improve your garden for [butterflies and moths](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_butterflies.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_butterflies.pdf)

How to: Improve your garden for [birds](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_birds.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_birds.pdf)

How to: Create & maintain '[bee hotels](#)' [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_bee\\_hotel.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_bee_hotel.pdf)

How to: Grow plants in [containers](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_containers.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_containers.pdf)

How to: Make a [pond in a pot](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_pond\\_pot.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_pond_pot.pdf)

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [winter and early spring](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_plants\\_winter.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_plants_winter.pdf)

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [late spring and early summer](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_plants\\_spring.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_plants_spring.pdf)

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [late summer and autumn](#) [www.wlhf.org/ht\\_plants\\_summer.pdf](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_plants_summer.pdf)

RSPB [guidance](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/wildlife-gardening-for-balconies/) for balconies [www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/wildlife-gardening-for-balconies/](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/wildlife-gardening-for-balconies/)