

How to: Create a Green Wall for wildlife

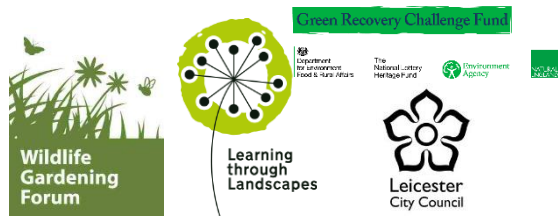


Photo: Mary Morgan

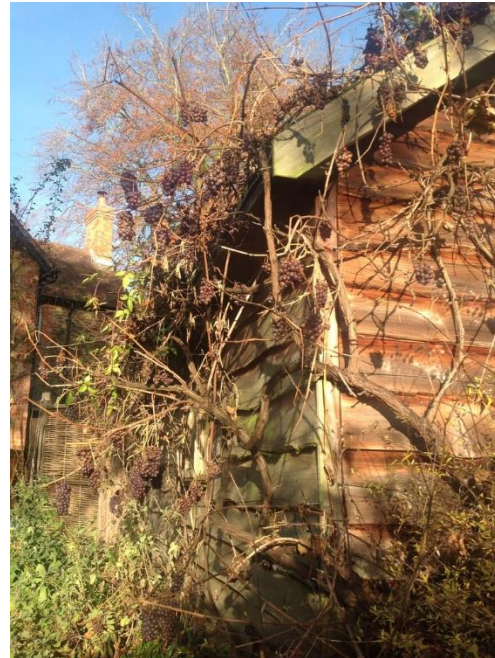


Photo: Helen Bostock



Photo: JM Staines

Planting vertically up walls is a good way to maximise your space for the benefit of wildlife. Walls and fences are often-overlooked in garden, but especially in small gardens they are a useful extra space for flowering plants and creating habitat

Target species

Pollinating insects on flowers, bats, birds and insects that can roost or hibernate in them, climbing animals.

How to do it

There are a different ways that planting vertically can be achieved, which have different levels of difficulty.

Creating suspended plantings and features

An easy approach is to add some hanging baskets, which can either be nailed to a wall or hung off pegs. Trailing plants can be added to the edges of hanging baskets, with pollinator-friendly flowers such as flowering herbs, meadow crane's-bill, fuchsia, dead-nettles added to the centre. You could also install bat boxes and bird boxes in quiet spots, giving space for flying vertebrates to shelter and breed in your garden.

Grow climbing plants

There are several climbing plants which are brilliant for wildlife; ivy (*Hedera helix*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), hops (*Humulus lupulus*) and traveller's joy (*Clematis vitalba*) are all good

options, providing cover for birds as well as nectar for pollinators. Of these ivy is the best overall plant for wildlife, and when it is well established it provides superb cover for roosting and nesting animals. Ivy needs to climb to flower and fruit and is then a good nectar source as well as yielding winter berries for birds. Climbers can be helped if you give them trellises to climb over; these can be secured onto a wall or fence. A variant of this would be to fix thin wires in a grid over the wall, against which you can train shrubs such as *Buddleja*, *Pyracantha*, *Wisteria*, grape vines, blackberries and single climbing roses, tying them on to the wire. Ivy and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus* species) fix themselves to walls and can climb up and over roofs if you let them.

Build a planter wall

You can get as creative as you like with creating a vertical set up of planters! A range of small pots and planters attached to a support is the most useful way to build a vertical garden, really extending your planting space. A sustainable way to do this would be using a reclaimed wooden pallet as scaffolding, either hanging pots using jubilee clips from it or supporting them from below. Other scaffolds, such as steps or ladders, can be fashioned out of wood and attached to walls. You can find lots of great inspiration on YouTube!



Engineered green walls

These really need professional help, since they involve hanging fabrics with irrigated planting pockets, and are correspondingly expensive. However, they can look very fine in public places in cities such as this one in the main square in Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Photo: Steve Head

How easy is it to do?

Easy/moderate/difficult, all depending on the amount of DIY you choose to do! Setting up hanging baskets is easy and installing a pre-made bird or bat box is extremely simple. Setting up scaffolds for plants, be this trellis or pallet support, can be slightly more difficult and DIY-based; it may work well to start simple and gain experience towards the more complex tasks.

How much will it cost?

This will vary depending on how much DIY you decide to do, and what materials you use for this. Vertical planters can be made from pallets which may well be free. There are many sorts of hanging baskets, most of which are £5-10 unplanted. Bird nest boxes cost somewhere between £10-£30. The cost of trellises varies a fair amount. Wooden trellis cost £10-£40 depending on type and size. Making your own wire support system costs only about £6 for 30m of wire and £6 for galvanised ring screws, plus wall screw fixtures if you are drilling into brick.

How effective is it for the target species?

Effective. A vertical garden will provide a lot of extra space for climbing plants; this can increase the abundance and diversity of flowers in your garden, which will really encourage pollinator

populations. The extra cover provided by a green wall provide useful shelter for birds, and any bat or bird boxes correctly installed will encourage these animals to set up home in your garden.

Golden rules – what the science tells us

- The science of green walls remains relatively under- studied despite their popularity. The RHS has been working on a [long-term study](#) to assess the benefits of green walls and climbers
- Green walls on a house will increase insulation keeping you warmer in winter and cooler in summer.

What to look for?

Pollinator species will be encouraged by green walls, so look out for visitors while your wall is in flower. If you have ivy flowering and fruiting in the autumn and winter, look out for bees on the flowers and blackbirds and cumbersome pigeons taking fruit.

Things to be aware of

- Make sure to check that everything is properly secured to the support and be sure not to put anything too heavy in your planters.
- Remember plants in pots need watering – sometimes daily, and against a sheltering wall they may not receive the amount of rain they would on the ground
- Remember to provide proper drainage for any pots so make sure there are holes in the bottom of the pots or drill them in yourself.
- Another important point is to make sure you're choosing the right plants for your wall. What direction is your wall facing in and how much sun does it usually get? Most plants in pots like sun, but both ivy and honeysuckle can grow well in part-sun, part-shade.

Further information

How to: Improve a [small garden](#) for wildlife www.wlfg.org/ht_small_garden.pdf

Websites

The Wildlife Trusts have a [useful page](#) with a step-by-step guide on how to create a pallet vertical garden using pots www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-create-vertical-garden

RHS has some [useful advice](#) about green walls: www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=380

RHS Green walls and Biodiversity [study](#): www.rhs.org.uk/science/plant-health-in-gardens/entomology/rhs-projects-on-plant-pests/Green-Walls-and-Biodiversity

YouTube has several very informative, step-by-step instructional videos on how to make your own vertical planter supports- just type in 'how to make a vertical garden'.

Greening the building envelope, façade greening and living wall systems [Perine and others](#) (2011) doi.org/10.4236/oje.2011.11001

Book

Planting Green Roofs and Living Walls. N Dunnett & N Kingsbury (2004) Timber Press