

## How to: Plan a wildlife friendly garden



*If you are starting in a brand-new house and garden - or if you want to make big changes to an old garden, it's sensible to think hard about what you want to achieve and make a working plan to guide your decisions. Remember that gardens are multi-use places and you may have to share your wildlife features with space for children's play and domestic use.*

*Well planned wildlife garden Photo: J. M. Staines*

### Target species:

Potentially all garden wildlife – but you may want to concentrate your efforts on one or more main groups that particularly interest you

### How to do it – Think first!

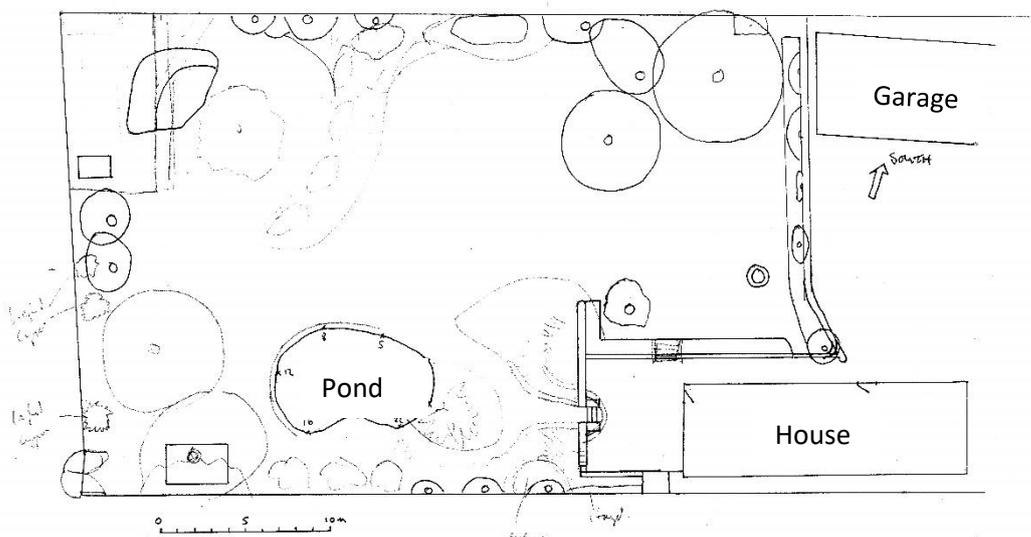
- What is there already? Before you start altering the garden, be sure you have checked the value of what is already there. Are there useful trees and shrubs? Does the lawn already have flowers in if you let it grow a bit longer? Are there undisturbed areas good for wildlife like hedgehogs and toads to hide in? Is there a boggy area that could be made into (or be adjacent to) a pond? We recommend living with the garden through the seasons before taking drastic action, to make sure you really know what is already there.
- Then – the opposite – are there any features you don't like – paving, decaying sheds, bramble patch – or things outside the garden like lampposts or nearby houses you want to hide. You can plan to remedy these as part of the plan.
- What are you most interested in? There will be all sorts of wildlife in your garden, but many people are especially keen on their favourite groups, like wildflowers, frogs, birds, bees or butterflies. You could choose to specialise on helping this group, especially if you have limited space. Do a bit of research on our website and how-to guides so you know what your chosen group(s) need.
- Provide suitable food plants. For adult pollinators this means plenty of flowers of a good range of species chosen from our recommended lists. They don't need to be native species, but the more there are, and the more flowers they bear the better.
- Insects need food for their larval stages too. Most are happy to browse on a wide range of plants but some, especially butterflies are very picky. Look at our list of plants for butterfly caterpillars and try to provide some of these (mostly native) plants to help.
- Birds need food like berries and seeds, but mostly they need caterpillars and other insects to feed their young. If you want lots of birds, look after the insects as well.

- Provide water. A pond is ideal and essential for amphibians and dragonflies, but if you can't manage that plan put in a raised bird bath for birds and honeybees, and bury a washing-up bowl as a mini-pond for hedgehogs and other animals – making sure they can get in and out.
- Plan to have lots of hiding places under shrubs or hedges where wildlife can find shelter

## How to do it – Making a plan on paper

This really doesn't have to be very detailed or even very accurate!

- For a small uncluttered garden, you can manage with a sketch plan (from "above") that shows what is there – and label it so you can remember what each feature is. Use a long tape measure to get the proportions about right. Mark on it the features to keep, and the things you want to lose or hide. If the garden is really large and complicated, you might find Google Earth useful to get an outline of the features. Look at the recommended garden design books if you want to do a really good job.



*Here is an early plan of Steve Head's garden after the pond was made, but before new beds were dug.*

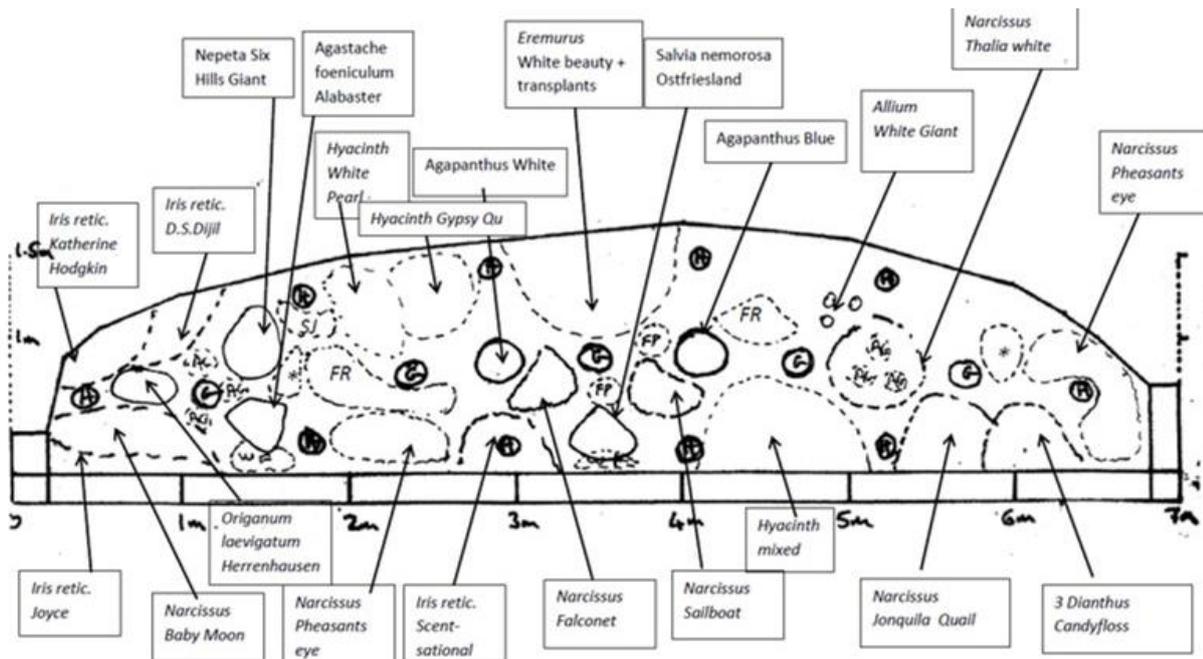
- Note where the sun comes from through the day. It's important to bear this in mind for plants that need shade or full sunlight.
- Note where you need access, and plan where your paths need to be. Clearly mark important existing wildlife features and things to hide
- Make several photocopies before you start to sketch out the new designs, especially ones where the eyesores are removed showing all the space you can use.



- Sketch or take photos of the views from where you would look out of a window or sit in the garden – this will help you to get a feel for where trees or flower beds would "look right"

*This sketch clearly shows the unwanted view of the neighbours!*

- Experiment with where to put your chosen features. You may find it difficult to get in all you want, and remember that plants grow, and a small shrub could eventually cover a large area



Sketch plan of a new bed – concentrating on the planting

- Share your plan with other household members especially children, and make sure they are happy and there is something for everyone.
- Once you have decided on your plan, try to stick to it as you develop the garden over the years, but do be prepared to adapt it if some features prove not to work.

### How easy is it to do?

Quite easy – and quite exciting as your new garden takes shape on paper.

### How much will it cost?

Practically nothing to make a plan – but think about how much your planting and features will cost, and don't plan what you can't afford. You can take as long as you like to actually construct the garden, and spread the cost over a couple of years.

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

Planning and forethought are very effective in delivering the mix of features to suit your garden ambitions.

### Golden rules – what the science tells us

- All wildlife needs the same basics. Food, water, shelter and somewhere to breed, so keep this in mind throughout
- Since most garden wildlife species are small, big gardens aren't essential
- Typical gardens have a mosaic of mini-habitats and this variety is important in supporting a wide range of species
- Make sure you have plenty of vertical structure – a flat garden isn't very attractive for birds or many insects.

- Gardens only have space for a few trees, so choose carefully from our lists of hedge and tree species
- Wildlife needs support all year round. Plan to provide nectar flowers through all the seasons (see our lists) and have some evergreen plants (ideally holly or ivy-covered walls) to provide winter shelter
- Bird nest boxes and bee hotels need to be properly sited, so read our information on these

### **Things to be aware of**

- Don't forget to leave space for people – especially children
- It is easy to be over-ambitious and forget that what may look spacious on your plan might be quite small and poky in the real garden.
- When planning a pond, check there aren't trees close by, or power or water and sewage pipes where you need to dig.
- If you plant tall trees in the sunny south-facing side of your garden, the chances are they will shade your neighbour's and they might not be best pleased.

### **Further information**

#### **Our website**

[Garden design](http://www.wlgf.org/garden_design.html) with wildlife in mind [www.wlgf.org/garden\\_design.html](http://www.wlgf.org/garden_design.html)

Creating a [garden pond](http://www.wlgf.org/Establishing_pond.html) [www.wlgf.org/Establishing\\_pond.html](http://www.wlgf.org/Establishing_pond.html)

[Native trees](http://www.wlgf.org/trees_shrubs.html) for gardens [www.wlgf.org/trees\\_shrubs.html](http://www.wlgf.org/trees_shrubs.html)

[Hedge plants](http://www.wlgf.org/hedge_plants.html) for wildlife [www.wlgf.org/hedge\\_plants.html](http://www.wlgf.org/hedge_plants.html)

Several of our other ["How-to" guides](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_intro.html) will help your planning [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_intro.html](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_intro.html)

#### **Books on garden design generally**

"The Essential Garden Design Workbook" by Rosemary Alexander. 2017 (Third edition). Published by Timber Press. Very practical, very well illustrated, highly recommended

"Garden Design" by John Brookes. 2001. Published by Dorling Kindersley. A good introduction, lots of inspiring photographs and plans

"Essential Garden planning and construction" edited by Christopher Brickell. 2006 Published by the Royal Horticultural Society. Good on design basics, excellent on materials and techniques.