

Key wildlife needs for garden designers

By Jan Miller-Klein

Reviewed by Steve Head

Some people might think that 'wildlife garden' and 'design' are mutually exclusive, but in fact a little thought, planning and design can make a lot of difference to how much wildlife will visit your garden- especially if you only have a small space. You don't have to be a professional naturalist to incorporate the main things that all wildlife need; these are shelter, food, suitable breeding places and hibernation places. In the UK climate this means having a lot of different habitats available all year round. The most beneficial places to find this in nature are often woodland edges – and our gardens can be surrogate woodland clearings.

1. Shelter; you need different heights to protect from wind and extreme weather, plus levels of shade provided by trees and shrubs (just one tree if you have a small garden) – these can also provide food for many birds, insects and small mammals – from their leaves (insect larvae), fruit (insects, birds, mice), flowers (insects) and seeds (birds, insects and small mammals). The insects in turn supply a lot of food for birds, amphibians and some other creatures. See [Plants for structure](#)
2. Food ; The next level down is the flowers, which also can supply nectar, pollen, fruit and seeds, and finally the lawn, which if allowed to grow for a couple of weeks between mowings can also provide nectar sources and open feeding areas. You don't have to grow a tall untidy meadow to have all these benefits. Nor do you have to grow things you don't like – nettles for example are still plentiful around the countryside and brownfield sites. See our pages under [Plants and Planting](#)
3. Breeding places; this can vary from free-draining, sandy ground for burrowing bees to trees and old ivy-covered walls for nesting birds. For amphibians and many insects it can also be a pond. See [Plants for structure](#) , [Garden habitats](#), [Garden ponds](#).
4. Hibernation places; all insects and amphibians have to hibernate to get through our cold winters; only a few mammals have to do this. Hibernation for butterflies and moths (which mostly do it as larvae, eggs or pupae) can be either in the leaf-litter under plants, dead stems of last years' plants or in crevices in a wood pile or under dry ivy. Hedgehogs need dry leaf-litter places under hedges and I have found a lot of Bumblebee queens hibernating in the rotting insides of a dead tree. See [Plants for structure](#) , [Garden habitats](#)

Many other pages of this website will give you the specific plants, pond details, breeding , food and hibernation needs of different species, but if you keep all the above in mind when planning your wildlife garden your wildlife will be able to find a way to live comfortably alongside you.

Jan Miller-Klein is the author of 'Gardening for Butterflies, Bees and other beneficial insects'. She is a former Trustee of the Wildlife Gardening Forum, chair of her local branch of the Wildlife Trust, volunteer for Butterfly Conservation and manages 8 acres of garden, with the National Collection of *Eupatorium*, plus wildlife meadows that have featured on BBC Gardeners' World. Her garden designs for biodiversity in public parks have won gold medals in Britain in Bloom and Wales in Bloom several years running. She runs a mail-order wildlife plants and design service from her website www.7wells.co.uk