



How to Help

Hedgehogs in Your Garden

If you are lucky enough to discover a hedgehog in your garden, try to persuade it to stay. As well as having a tiny wild creature under your care, the hedgehog will clear your garden of slugs and snails better than any other method. Hedgehogs have been known to eat their body weight in insects in one night. Offer your hedgehog plates of food. Any type except fish-based ones should do. **Don't give your hedgehog bread or milk, as it will eat it and upset it's stomach.** If you feed your hedgehog for a few nights, it may realise it is onto a good thing and decide to stay with you. If this happens, the hedgehog will get to know you and will come looking for food. When winter arrives, it will make a pile of dead leaves and go to sleep. At the start, it may wake up occasionally and appear once or twice a week. Eventually it will settle into the death-like sleep of true hibernation and you won't see it again until spring.

When your hedgehog wakes up, make sure you are ready to feed it, or it might wander off. Nevertheless, it will probably leave you sooner or later, leaving behind a garden cleared of slugs and snails. You probably won't see a slug or snail for about a year after you say good-bye to your hedgehog.

As Winter approaches, our Ranger Service often make hedgehog boxes for your garden. Check our annual events programme for these events and you can take home your very own hedgehog hibernation home.

Birds in Your Garden

In winter, a bird's natural food supplies such as insects and seeds become very scarce. You can help these birds to survive over the cold winter by feeding these birds in your garden.

Fruits such as apples and pears or dried fruit like raisins and sultanas (although these need to be soaked in water first) are nutritious and useful sources of food for many birds. These can be placed on a ledge, bird table or scattered on the ground.

Nuts are rich in fat and a useful source of energy for birds in winter. Hazelnuts, almonds and walnuts can all be put out for birds but the most commonly used nut is the peanut. Salted peanuts should never be used unless first thoroughly washed and dried.

Peanuts should be grated or placed in wire mesh feeders if being put out in the spring to prevent them choking baby birds.

Coconut flesh or half a coconut shell hung up in the garden is another favourite with birds. Mouldy nuts should always be removed from feeding sites as these contain a poison made by the mould.

Kitchen scraps can be used to feed a wide variety of birds from rooks to robins. Cooked potatoes, rice, cake, pre-soaked bread and cold porridge are all suitable. However make sure that some bread is broken into small pieces to feed the smaller birds. Bacon rind, strips of cooked meat or even marrow bones with some meat and fat can be hung up to feed birds.

When feeding birds it is important to remember that a collection of birds will attract those animals which eat birds and a collection of food will attract animals other than birds including cats. If you don't have a bird table, try to place the food near a hedge so that birds can use this as cover if they need to escape. If cheeky squirrels are coming in to your garden to eat the bird food it may be best to set up separate feeding stations for them, providing them with nuts and fruits hopefully keeping them away from the bird's food

How else can you help care for your environment?

Become a Junior Ranger! Get involved! If you can spare an hour or so of your time you can make a difference by helping wildlife directly or by assisting other people to do so. There are lots of conservation and wildlife organisations such as the RSPB, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club which have groups throughout Ayrshire, all of them need your support!

Plant a tree! Over the years as the tree grows it will provide a home (and food!) for a variety of insects and birds. If you don't have a garden try to find a local park or other space where you could plant a tree or why not take part in an organised tree planting day?

If you are a keen gardener make your own compost. Collecting vegetable peelings and other kitchen scraps as well as clippings from the garden can be a simple way of making your own compost; they just need to be put in a convenient place and covered up until they rot down. Special compost bins can be easily made or cheaply bought.

Plant some wildflowers. Even if you don't have a garden a few flowers in pots or in a window box will provide food for bees, butterflies and other insects.

Walk, run, skip and cycle more! It doesn't matter if you use your feet, a bike or a pogo stick, but try to travel green once in a while. The advantages of doing this are obvious, less pollution, fewer road accidents and a cleaner environment for wildlife and humans!

Building a Bird Box

1. You will need a plank of wood about 1.5 metres long, 150mm wide and 15mm thick. Use untreated wood as chemicals used to treat wood may harm or discourage birds or bats.

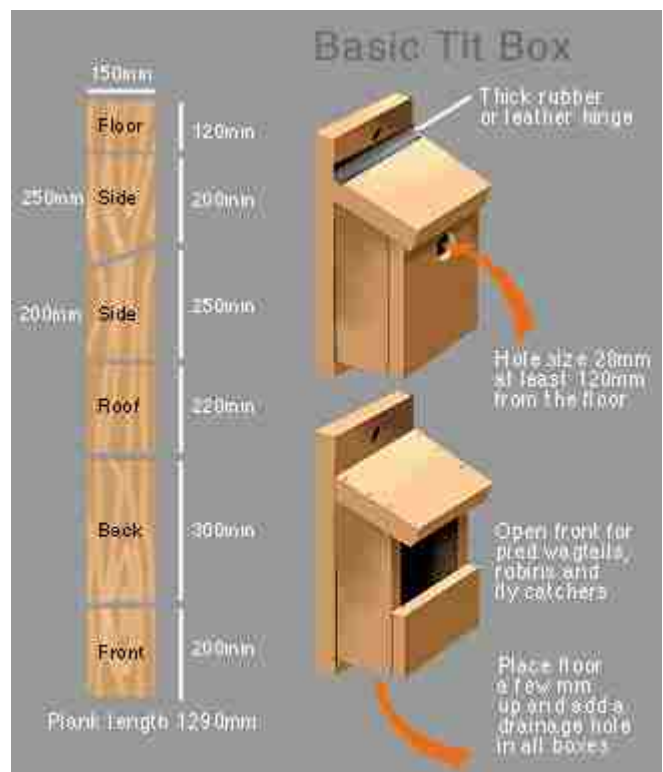
2. Mark up the plank of wood to the sizes shown in 'mm' and cut with a saw. Drill the entrance hole at least 125mm from the base of the box. If it is less, young birds may be scooped out by a cat. Also, remember to drill four small drainage holes in the base.

3 Assemble the pieces as shown using galvanised nails or screws. Hinge the lid with a strip of rubber. An old piece of bicycle inner tube will do. A catch to fasten the lid is essential. Use rubber or roof felt to waterproof the roof. The size of the entrance hole can be altered to attract different species of birds

4 As an alternative, by cutting away the top half of the front panel you will also attract Robins, Wagtails and Wrens. The Spotted Flycatcher, a summer visitor, also likes this type of box.

5 Bird boxes can be nailed to posts or tied to trees using wire. Remember to get permission to put your bird box up. Place the box three to five metres high, well out of the reach of cats or curious humans. Place facing between north and south east, to avoid strong sunlight and the wettest winds. Also, tilt slightly forward to allow rain to run off, away from the entrance hole.

Never disturb birds using your box. When you are sure that the birds have left in the autumn, clean the box out. Remember though, they may raise a second brood or use the box as a roost, so check first. Most birds carry parasites, so wear protective gloves and put nesting material straight into a bag. Cleaning is important as it will make your box more attractive to birds in the spring.



Building a Bird Table

Bird tables are a great way of attracting birds to your garden and are particularly useful in the winter when food is hard to find. A simple flat bird table is effective and easy to make.

Take a wooden pole about 1.5 metres high, and nail a wooden board to the top. Add a strip of wood about 2cm high around the edge of the board, leaving a small gap for rainwater to drain away. This will help to stop

the food being blown away. Anchor the central pole firmly into the ground. Think carefully about where to position the table. It needs to be fairly close to dense bushes to provide refuge for birds avoiding sparrowhawks, but not so close as to provide cover for predatory cats.

You will need to remove old food and clean the table regularly to prevent the spread of diseases such as salmonella. Provide birds with a bowl of water on the table, especially in the winter when water is often frozen. You can also make a very simple birdbath by sinking a dustbin lid into the ground and filling it with water. The water needs to be kept clean and free of ice.

