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Opening extract from

RHS: Wildlife Garden

Written by

Martyn Cox

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Grow it

A wildlife hedge

Hedges are alive with wildlife. They provide food, shelter, cover, security, and a place for animals to hibernate and raise their young. Not only that, but as a hedge flowers, it attracts a mass of buzzing, nectar-eating bees, butterflies, and other bugs.





Birds use hedges for cover. They also make their nests in them and eat the nuts and berries of plants – or any bugs they may find there, like this sparrow.



Insects feed and live on plants. They also make a tasty snack for birds. Many are well camouflaged to blend into their green background and are hard to spot, even when you are looking right at them!



Voles shelter at the bottom of a hedge and use its protection to move from one part of the garden to another. These shy creatures are difficult to see as they only come out at night and like to stay hidden.



Bees and butterflies are attracted by the nectar-rich flowers that grow on some hedges, like the hawthorn. They also like the flowers that grow at the base of hedges.

What makes a native hedge?

A native hedge is composed of several different trees and shrubs, climbers, and wild flowers. Typically, it will consist of 25% hawthorn and then four other varieties of tree. After it has established, native climbing plants and wild flowers can be added. Among the best trees and shrubs are spindle, hazel, field maple, sweet briar, crab apple, blackthorn and common alder. Honeysuckle, ivy, and clematis are ideal climbers. And, to make it even more wildlife-friendly, you could plant wild primrose, wild strawberry, red campion, and greater stitchwort at the bottom.



Mice like to live in hedgerows. They are agile and can climb to the upper branches of hedges. They are on the look out for snails, centipedes, and other tasty creatures to munch on.



Frogs and toads hibernate in old wood that gathers at the bottom of the hedge. They can also feed on any passing bugs during the summer, camouflaging beautifully into the leaf litter at the base.



Grow your own hedge

A hedge looks great around a garden. Trees and shrubs are best planted in autumn, spaced 36 cm (1 ft) apart. If you don't have the room to plant one, you can grow an ornamental hedge in a long, wide container such as a trough. Fill it with multi-purpose compost and place the plants close together. Let them knit together. Keep plants at a manageable height by pruning. They will soon attract lots of insects and pollinators.

Grow it

Smiley sunflowers

Sunflowers are great all-rounders for wildlife, and if you have room for just one plant, make it a sunflower! They grow well in any large container – just make sure they have plenty of water and sunlight. These plants are not only easy and fun to grow, reaching amazing heights, but they also provide year-round food for wildlife.



Did you know?

- Sunflowers are not just yellow. Seed companies sell varieties with white, orange, red, and chocolate coloured blooms.
- Dwarf varieties of sunflower grow to just 45 cm (12 in) and are ideal for pots.
- The sunflower is native to North America, but is the national flower of Russia.
- Sunflower seeds are rich in oil and are full of calcium, iron, and lots of important minerals.

Sowing indoors



Plant some seeds into empty yoghurt pots using seed compost. Sow a single seed in each, 3 cm (1 in) deep. Water.



When it outgrows the original container, put it into a bigger pot (with a drainage hole in the bottom) in a sunny spot outdoors when there is no risk of frost.



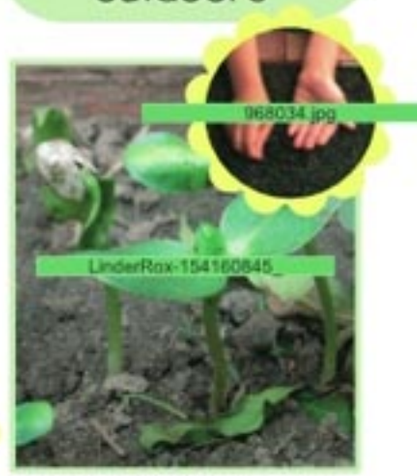
Put in a sunny place and cover with polythene. Soon a little shoot will appear (remove the polythene at this point).



Once your sunflower has started to fade, pick out a few old blossoms and make your very own "sunflower smile".



Sowing outdoors



Prepare the soil well by digging over the area and raking it until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Then sow your seeds 5 cm (2 in) deep, 45 cm (12 in) apart. Cover and water. Three weeks later they should start sprouting.

A food feast

Sunflowers provide nectar for bugs and then a feast of delicious seeds. Once the sunflower has flowered, leave the head to droop and dry and watch as birds, squirrels, and small mammals visit and munch away. Yum! Yum!

This tit picks off the old blossoms with its beak to get to the juicy seeds.



Grow it

Plant a tree

Every wildlife garden should have at least one tree.

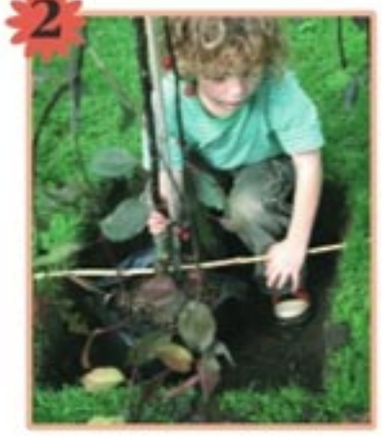
Leafy canopies provide shelter for timid creatures, while birds and some small mammals will build nests in their branches. Berries, fruit, and nuts are an important source of food, and blossom attracts pollinating insects. Choose your tree carefully. Some are ideal in a small space, but others are more suitable for a larger garden.

What you will need:





First dig your hole. Make the hole at least twice as wide as the tree's "rootball".



Make sure it's the right depth by placing a stick across the hole and seeing if it is level with the tree's container.



Remove the plastic around the tree's roots and fill in the soil around the tree.



Hammer in your stake at a 45° angle and attach the stake to the tree with a tree tie.



Water the tree. Job done! Make sure you keep the tree well watered and remove the stake when the tree is strong enough to stand alone.

Tree life

The mammal you are most likely to see in a tree is a squirrel. They love nuts and fruits, and are extremely acrobatic. They sleep in it, eat in it and they like a good play in it too!



A tree that blossoms in spring provides a nectar feast for bees and other insects. In fact, fruit trees rely on insects for pollination. If it wasn't for bugs, there would be no fruit.



Birds eat berries and fruit from trees. The autumn glut provides them with enough food to help get through winter.



TREE IN A POT

Planting a tree in a pot is just as easy. Make sure there is a hole in the bottom of the pot, covered with a layer of pebbles. Place your tree in the centre, and fill in with loam-based compost (which is the best at holding water and will keep the tree upright).