



# Creating WILDLIFE HABITATS



## Why make a wildlife garden?



Wildlife is coming under increasing threat in Ireland, not only in cities and towns but also in the countryside. Modern farming methods, forestry plantations, destruction of old native forests, building work and new roads are all putting pressure on our native plants, animals and habitats.

Some of the most common wildflowers are becoming increasingly rare because wildflower meadows are being built on, ploughed, sprayed or fertilised to encourage grass growth. As the meadows disappear so too will the habitats for many butterflies, moths, skylarks and other wildlife that depend on them.

Wildlife does not just exist in the countryside, it is all around us. The wildlife of towns and cities can be surprisingly rich and includes foxes, hedgehogs, butterflies, birds etc. We should work with nature whenever possible and create new habitats for wildlife. Waste areas and unused land in towns and suburbs often provide an opportunity for enhancing or creating nature areas.

## Creating wildlife habitats

With a little knowledge and patience you can create habitats that are of interest to you and of benefit to wildlife.

The kinds of animals and wildflowers that you find in your garden will depend on where you live, how old the garden is and the food and shelter offered. If you are interested in attracting specific birds, butterflies or mammals you will have to provide for their individual needs.

In the borders of the garden try to develop several layers of vegetation - trees if you have

room, a lower canopy of shrubs and shade-loving plants beneath. Include some evergreens for winter cover and deciduous shrubs to allow light in the spring.

A hedge is a most valuable habitat and a pond introduces water-dwelling creatures and plants, attracting many passing visitors to drink and bathe. Flower borders will attract insects that feed on pollen and nectar.

Try to have the border blooming over as long a period as possible, followed by seeds and berry bearing shrubs for the birds. Hedges and wildflower meadows can be used to introduce native plants into a small garden. Woodland wildflowers will grow under deciduous shrubs and trees.

You can add as many habitats to your garden as space will allow, try to include some or all of the following:

### ■ Wood & Stone Piles

A stone pile has plenty of nooks and crannies which make ideal homes for a variety of creatures from ground beetles to ants and spiders. A wood pile in an unused area which can be left undisturbed will provide homes for many grubs, insects and worms which in turn attract birds and small mammals.

### ■ Wildflower Meadow

A patch of long grass with naturalised flowers provides food cover and nesting material for insects, birds and mammals. Mow edges as usual to minimise "neglected look". Avoid straight edges and meander to provide a natural boundary.

### ■ Garden flowers Shrubs & Herbs

When deciding on flowers and shrubs to plant in your garden it is important to choose varieties for pollen (e.g. *golden rod*), nectar (e.g. *red valerian*), seedheads (e.g. *teazle*), berries (e.g. *catoneaster*) and continuous flowering.



### ■ Hedgerows

Hedges provide food, shelter and first class nesting sites for birds, and they act



as sheltered corridors for creatures going from garden to garden and to wild areas beyond. Plant with native or naturalised species like hawthorn, blackthorn, beech and field maple.

## ■ Trees & Shrubs


Along the northern and eastern side of the garden trees and shrubs will provide shelter and create a woodland edge habitat which is very good for songbirds.

## ■ Pond or Marsh Area

Water is essential for wildlife. So setting up a pond or marsh area somewhere in the garden is of great benefit to all the wildlife in the garden. Include plenty of plants around the edge to give shelter to amphibians. Leave part of east of pond free of plants - the early sun will defrost the water allowing birds to drink.

## ■ Honeysuckle, Ivy & Bramble

These climbing plants can usually be found in a hedge but can also be grown over a wall. They provide nectar, edible fruits and cover for wildlife. Ivy also provides late season food for butterflies and insects. Brambles' prickly branches provide safe nesting habitats.



bat box:  
summer - roost on a hot south wall  
winter - face north



garden flowers - choose for pollen, nectar, seed-heads & a continuous sequence of flowers

bat box:  
summer - roost on a hot south wall  
winter - face north

bird table



apples on the lawn in winter

a small patch of 'cornfield weeds'

dead wood left to rot down

nest boxes out of the sun



## Tips for attracting wildlife!

If you already have a well established garden there are things you can do to encourage animals into your garden without completely changing your gardening methods.

- An unturned and half varied flowerpot, or a ventilation brick secured in the ground makes an ideal nesting site for bees. Add some dry moss for bedding.
- Make and position bird and bat boxes for your garden. Place them out of the sun and up high away from predators, especially cats.
- Construct a bird table and feed the birds every day, not forgetting to stop in April once the first chicks have hatched. For ground feeding birds leave apples on the grass, those will also be visited by butterflies and insects.

## ■ Stinging Nettles

Nettles provide food for caterpillars of the *peacock*, *red admiral*, and *tortoiseshell* butterflies. The nettle patch needs to be cut back to allow lots of young nettles to grow.

## ■ Bat Boxes & Nestboxes for birds

Bats need roosting sites for winter use, and birds often need places to shelter in harsh weather. You can help by building bat boxes or nestboxes for birds.