

# Encourage Biodiversity



Simply put, 'biodiversity' means many different life forms. For the gardener, this can be done in three simple ways:

Growing different types of plants, so that a variety of flowers, vegetables, trees and shrubs are all present.

Providing habitats and food for wildlife such as birds, insects and mammals. They are not only a delight to look at, but each species has its role in maintaining a natural balance.

And feeding the soil life. A healthy soil is full of bacteria, fungi, microbes and creatures which create the right environment for plants to thrive, releasing nutrients and creating good soil structure.

With this variety of different species, all working together, the organic grower encourages a healthy interdependency between plants and wildlife. This, in turn, creates a resilient growing area.

The benefits of encouraging biodiversity:

- **Helps manage pests and diseases.** Varying your planting, whether vegetables, fruit or flowers, helps prevent the build-up of soil diseases. You will also create a variety of food sources and shelter for birds and insects. Encouraging this wildlife into your garden will help control many pests. Birds and insects eat aphids for example; frogs and ground beetles eat the slugs.
- **Supports soil life.** Adding well-rotted natural materials, such as homemade compost, will feed the tiny soil microbes and other life forms, such as worms. These soil creatures help create a better soil structure, as well as digesting waste matter and secreting nutrients.

In this chapter we look at:

- **Ways to build a biodiverse system**
- **Encouraging wildlife**

# Ways to Build a Biodiverse System



## BEST ORGANIC PRACTICE

- **Create a fertile, biologically active soil.** Add composted organic materials to enrich soil life. (See **Soil Cultivation Techniques** on p. 8)
- **Grow a mix of different plants to provide food, shelter and habitats for wildlife.** Grow flowers, shrubs and vegetables which flower (and seed) at different times to provide food for insects and birds. This also creates diverse areas for shelter and nesting.
- **Leave some 'relaxed' areas.** Don't be too tidy – leaves under a hedge, old wood piles, weeds or longer grass, will feed and shelter wildlife.
- **Recognise that weeds (in the right location) can bring something positive to your garden.** Some provide food for pollinators.
- **Create diverse areas, such as long grass, bushes, hedges and ponds.** These will encourage a mix of wildlife, including beneficial insects (hoverflies, ladybirds etc), hedgehogs, toads, frogs and birds.
- **Some pests are always present.** Don't exterminate them. For instance, aphids and slugs are a necessary food source for valuable predators such as birds and ladybirds.



## NOT ACCEPTABLE IN ORGANIC GROWING

- **Use of weedkillers and pesticides which contain toxic chemicals.**
- **Extensive use of hard surfaces (paving, gravel or decking) which reduces the amount of growing areas.** Not only does this prevent soak away for rainwater, it also deters natural lifeforms and reduces habitats.
- **Monoculture planting.** This is where just one species is planted extensively, to the exclusion of other diverse species. Examples include growing rows of bedding plants which all flower at the same time, or just one type of vegetable throughout the growing area. This limits the food sources or habitats for wildlife, and does little to enhance soil life.

### FOR ADVICE ON:



1. How to manage your soil, go to [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/managing-your-soil](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/managing-your-soil)
2. How to grow an organic lawn, go to [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organic-lawn](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organic-lawn)
3. How to encourage wildlife into your garden, go to [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/wildlife-gardening](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/wildlife-gardening)
4. Creating a garden pond, go to [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/creating-pond](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/creating-pond)

# Encouraging Wildlife

Birds, insects, small mammals and amphibians not only add to the biodiversity of your growing patch, but also many of them act as predators on pests such as slugs, snails and aphids. As a result, there is no need for toxic chemicals. Whether you grow in pots in a backyard, a window box or an allotment, it's exciting to know that you can encourage all sorts of wildlife – from a moth to a bat, a robin or a bumble bee.



## BEST ORGANIC PRACTICE

- **Grow a mix of different plants to provide food, shelter and habitats for wildlife.** Flowers, shrubs and vegetables should all be grown, to provide food for insects and birds. This also creates diverse areas for shelter and nesting.
- **Grow a variety of flowers, which bloom and seed at different times.** Flowers support insect and bird life. They can provide nectar for butterflies and bees; leaves for caterpillars and beetles; stems for insects to hibernate in; night scent to attract moths; as well as seed heads as a source of food for birds during winter.
- **Grow trees and shrubs.** If you have the space, plant trees and shrubs. They provide a rich larder of leaves and fruits, shade and shelter, as well as perching and nesting areas.
- **Look after the birds.** Provide suitable habitat for them to nest and perch. Feed them in the winter, and make sure they have access to water. Check RSPB guidelines.
- **Create a garden pond.** This creates a suitable habitat for amphibians such as frogs, toads and newts to breed, and provides water for birds.
- **Create nesting areas for insects.** You can create sheltered conditions for aphid-eating ladybirds and pollinators such as bees and hoverflies to overwinter.

