Get creative for hedgehogs this autumn

Small steps everyone can take together to help save the hedgehog

Find out more information at wildaboutgardens.org.uk
How well do you know these spiny garden visitors?

Home range & distribution
Hedgehogs are found across the UK, absent only from some Scottish islands. Gardens, hedgerows, woodlands, grasslands, parks and cemeteries are all important hedgehog habitats. Adult hedgehogs travel between 1-2km per night over home ranges as big as 10-20 hectares in size. In suburban areas, this means they range over entire housing estates and neighbourhoods.

Breeding
During the breeding season amorous hedgehogs can be seen (and heard!!) circling each other with snorts and grunts. Young are usually born from May onwards in litters of up to five and the young leave the nest after around four weeks. Baby hedgehogs (or hoglets) are born with their spines sheathed beneath their skin which then emerge a few hours after birth.

Hibernation
While many animals have adapted to cope with the harsh conditions of winter, hedgehogs are one of only a handful of UK mammals to truly hibernate, along with bats and dormice. Depending on the weather and their body condition, they enter a state of torpor from October/November to March/April, lowering their body temperature and slowing their metabolism to save energy. Hedgehogs must feed intensively and be in great condition before hibernating if they are to have enough reserves to last the winter.

On the menu
Hedgehogs eat a huge range of other garden invertebrates. In fact, beetles, earthworms and caterpillars make up most of their diet. If you want hedgehogs, you need creepy crawlies in abundance which can be attracted by planting a variety of different plants and creating habitats such as log piles.

Hedgehogs must feed intensively and be in great condition before hibernating!

Did you know...?

There are 14 different species of hedgehog around the world. The UK’s hedgehog – the European hedgehog – is found across Western Europe and Scandinavia.

Hedgehogs don’t have great eyesight, so rely on their sense of smell and hearing to navigate.

On average hedgehogs live for 2-5 years in the wild, but some have lived up to 10!

An adult hedgehog has up to 7,000 spines and a small, hidden tail.

Some hedgehogs are blonde! This colour mutation is called leucism and is thought to be caused by rare recessive genes.

We’ve seen declines in two thirds of the UK’s plant and animal species, and there are now thought to be fewer than 50 hedgehogs in just over 1 million left in the UK.

Hedgehog numbers have fallen by 30 percent in just over 10 years, including many of our once common garden species.

They are disappearing from our countryside as fast as tigers are worldwide.
**How To Help: Welcoming the hedgehog**

To save the hedgehog we need people to work together with neighbours to make small changes that will make a big difference. This is crucial because no garden or green space can help hedgehogs in isolation, but when they are linked together hedgehogs can thrive in any location.

**Create hedgehog highways**

Hedgehogs need to be able to roam far and wide in search of food, mates and nesting sites. Get together with your neighbours to cut a 13cm x 13cm hole (5in) hole in your fence or dig a channel beneath garden boundaries to connect your gardens. You can then add your hedgehog hole to our national network at HedgehogStreet.org.

**Avoid the use of pesticides**

Ditch the slug pellets and avoid the use of pesticides. Hedgehogs are natural “pest” controllers and need a plentiful and varied supply of invertebrate prey to stay healthy.

**Make water safe**

Hedgehogs are great swimmers but can sometimes struggle to climb out of steep-sided ponds and many drown. Provide a ramp from a plank wrapped in chicken wire or create shallow areas at the edge so they can scramble out.

**Provide nesting sites**

Log and leaf piles, wilderness areas and purpose-built hedgehog homes make great places for hedgehogs to nest.

**Grow a wide variety of plants**

Attract plenty of natural hedgehog food by keeping your garden diverse with a wide variety of habitats e.g. ponds, log piles, hedges, and a wide range of plant types. Don’t be afraid to let your grass grow a little wild and leave some leaf litter – as both are important homes for the hedgehog’s prey.

**Be aware of dangers**

Check for hidden hedgehogs before lighting bonfires, strimming and mowing the lawn. Keep plant netting, tennis nets and household rubbish above ground level to prevent entanglement.

**Log and leaf piles, wilderness areas and purpose-built hedgehog homes make great places for hedgehogs to nest**

**What do I do if I find an underweight hedgehog?**

- If you’re concerned about underweight hedgehogs or hedgehogs active in winter, provide kitten biscuits and fresh water. The British Hedgehog Preservation Society can offer advice and help you find a rescue centre near you:
  - w. britishhedgehogs.org.uk
  - e. info@britishhedgehogs.org.uk
  - t. 01584 890 801

**How do I help the hedgehog in my garden?**

- Create hedgehog highways
- Avoid the use of pesticides
- Make water safe
- Provide nesting sites

**Check out the website:**

hedgehogstreet.org

You can map any hedgehogs you may see, tell us about the hole in your fence or become a Hedgehog Champion and get stuck in right away.

Living in an urban area needn’t mean that you can’t help the ‘hog. Here are some top tips for getting involved:

- Post some invitations around your local neighbours to make them aware of what they can do to help. You could even throw a hedgehog-themed party to break the ice.
- If you live in a flat, try and influence the management of local greenspace by attending management meetings or joining the ‘friends of’ group.
- If you do have ‘hogs in your garden, you could set up a feeding station by cutting a hole in a plastic storage box and weighing down the lid with bricks; this will stop cats and foxes taking the food.
- Keep an eye out for people doing work on their gardens or using fencing contractors - this is a prime time to get a hedgehog hole put in and influence connectivity.

David Cooper

You can map any hedgehogs you may see, tell us about the hole in your fence or become a Hedgehog Champion and get stuck in right away.
Take these small steps to welcome hedgehogs into your neighbourhood.

Key
1. Create ‘hedgehog highways’ in your fences to connect your gardens.
2. Provide an escape route out of ponds – hogs are great swimmers but they struggle to climb out.
3. Create a variety of habitats e.g. ponds, hedges, log piles and compost heaps to attract food for the hedgehog.
4. Build a hedgehog home – give them somewhere to hunker down for the winter.
5. Let your grass grow wild (or even a section of it) to encourage the hedgehog’s prey. Check carefully before mowing or strimming areas.
6. Create nesting opportunities – leave wild areas for ‘hogs to hibernate.
7. Set up a feeding station offering hedgehog food or kitten biscuits and water.
8. Tidy up – litter harms wildlife, and hedgehogs can also become entangled in garden netting.
9. Keep domestic drains covered, hedgehogs can fall into them and get stuck.
10. Check bonfires before lighting; ideally rebuild them on the day it is to be lit.
11. Keep your gardens green – paving and decking over gardens reduces hedgehog habitat.
**Make a simple hedgehog house**

You will need:
- Medium-sized plastic box
- Stanley knife
- Leaf litter
- Dry grass or straw
- Carrier bag
- Twigs and dry leaves

1. Cut two side air vents and an entrance into the plastic box.
2. Lay a layer of leaf litter inside the box with clean, dry grass or straw on top.
3. Tuck the lid down over the entrance facing south (if possible).
4. Put an open-ended carrier bag over the top of the box. Then cover with twigs, dry grass and leaves.

**Make a deluxe hedgehog house**

You will need:
- 20mm E15 plywood boards cut to the sizes shown
- Hammer and nails
- 2 metal hinges
- Soil
- Dry leaves
- Straw or dry grass
- Newspapers
- Polyethylene sheeting

1. Construct the hedgehog house from the following diagram and dimensions.
2. Put the newspaper and straw or dry grass inside, cover the top with polythene sheeting.
3. Put the hedgehog house in your garden.
4. The roof is hinged so you can clean the box in future.
5. Do not paint or treat the wood
Hedgehogs eat a variety of insects, molluscs and other invertebrates, often switching from one food type to the other depending on the time of year. How does your garden stack up as a hedgehog buffet?

Tick off the menu items you’ve seen

- Earthworm
- Leatherjacket (cranefly larva)
- Earwig
- Millipede
- Caterpillar
- Weevil
- Butterfly/moth pupa
- Ground beetle
- Beetle larva
- Chafer beetle
- Snail
- Slug

Data from Yalden, D.W. (1976) The food of the hedgehog in England. Acta Theriologica 21: 401-424. Study examined animals that were trapped by gamekeepers using eggs as bait, so the proportion of eggs in a natural diet is likely to be lower.

Gardening For Hedgehogs

Encourage a glut of the hedgehog’s favourite food by creating micro-habitats that are great for invertebrates!

1. Choose plant species that are attractive to a range of insects
   Have a look at the RHS Perfect for Pollinators list for suggestions: rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators

2. Mulch beds with garden compost
   Encourages plenty of earthworms, woodlice and beetles as it begins to rot down!

3. Fallen leaf pile
   Provides the perfect shelter for ground beetles.

4. Wood pile
   Encourages a rich feast of earwigs, centipedes and woodlice!

5. Allow a patch of grass to grow long
   Will harbour insects including leatherjackets.

6. ‘Build a bug hotel’
   Stuff it with lots of straw and hollow plant stems and earwigs, centipedes and woodlice will soon make it their home.

7. Leave hollow plant stems over winter
   The perfect hiding place for ladybirds!

8. Create nesting opportunities
   Leave prunings and leaves in a wild corner for hedgehogs to make nests with. Hogs love apple and cherry leaves, and hawthorn and honeysuckle prunings make good structural supports.
How to make an animal footprint trap

You will need:
- old baking tray
- long ruler
- fine grain sand
- water
- low-sided dish
- meaty cat or dog food
- footprint ID guide

1. Fill an old baking tray with damp sand and smooth out the surface with a ruler.
   Check to make sure your fingers leave a mark.

2. Place hedgehog food or meaty cat or dog food in a low-sided dish in the middle of the tray.
   (you could also try mealworms or chopped, unsalted peanuts)

3. Leave the trap overnight in a garden and check in the morning for footprints left by curious visitors.

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Leave your garden wild

Take a day off today and do nothing! Leave a wild spot in your garden by not mowing the lawn, or not weeding the paving – nature will love it!
About Us

For more information about how you can help wildlife in your garden, including: gardening advice, activity ideas and species guides, visit The Wildlife Trusts and RHS partnership website wildaboutgardens.org.uk

The Wildlife Trusts
The Wildlife Trusts are the UK’s largest people-powered organisation caring for all nature – rivers, bogs, meadows, forests, seas and much more. There are Wildlife Trusts covering the whole of the UK with a shared mission to restore nature everywhere we can and to inspire people to value and take action for nature.

Many Wildlife Trusts run projects to specifically address the disappearance of our hedgehogs, including raising awareness amongst local communities, recording sightings, encouraging people to take action at home to help and targeting hedgehog hotspots for conservation effort. Find out more about some of these projects and how you can get involved at wildlifetrusts.org/hedgehogs

The Wildlife Trusts, The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 1WT
t: 01636 677711 e: info@wildlifetrusts.org
w: wildlifetrusts.org

The Royal Horticultural Society
For more than 210 years the Royal Horticultural Society has been the force behind gardening in the UK. We’re driven by a desire to enrich everyone’s life through plants, and make the nation a greener, more beautiful place.

We believe that everyone in every village, town and city should benefit from growing plants to enhance lives, build stronger, healthier, happier communities, and create better places to live.

Our work in education, science and communities is only possible thanks to the generous support of our visitors, members, partners, donors and sponsors.

With your help we can harness the power of horticulture, one gardener at a time.

The Royal Horticultural Society, 80 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PE
t: 0845 260 5000 e: membership@rhs.org.uk
w: rhs.org.uk

Hedgehog Street
Hedgehog Street is a campaign by People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) aimed at ensuring the hedgehog, the UK’s only spiny mammal, remains a common and familiar part of British life. We know hedgehogs are in trouble. We’ve lost a third of all our hedgehogs in ten years.

Fortunately, hedgehogs love gardens, and there are around half a million hectares of garden in the UK. Hedgehogs need access to lots and lots of different gardens to survive, so this campaign is as much about getting people to cooperate as it is about gardening for wildlife. Hedgehog Street has over 34,000 volunteer “Hedgehog Champions” right across the UK. Wherever you live, the green space in your local area can be a vital refuge for hedgehogs.

Hedgehog Street, 3 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG
t: 020 7498 4533 e: hedgehog@ptes.org
w: hedgehogstreet.org

Find out more information at wildaboutgardens.org.uk