

Encouraging Bugs in your garden

A good way of helping bugs in your garden is to plant wildflowers. These will provide pollen and nectar for bees and butterflies, and larvae (such as caterpillars) often feed on their leaves.

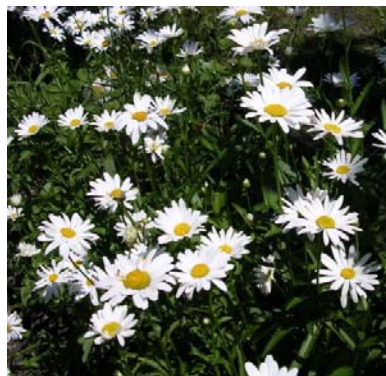
The best place to plant wildflowers is in a sunny spot in the garden, but if you don't have the space you can plant them in a container. Any container will do as long as it has drainage holes in the bottom. Once you've found a suitable container (an old bucket or plastic tub will do) fill it three-quarters full with peat-free compost.

Many wild flower seeds need to be chilled before they germinate so a good time to plant them is in late Autumn; firm down the soil, sprinkle the seeds on the surface, gently press them in with something flat, then water them. After that you can leave them alone, just make sure the compost doesn't dry out.

There are lots of wildflowers to choose from (for example, Knapweed, Lady's bedstraw, Meadow buttercup, Cowslip, Oxeye daisy, Black medic, Field scabious, Selfheal, wild parsnip, wild majoram, and Yarrow). If you buy a packet of mixed wildflower seed do make sure that they are all types that are native to the UK. If you can't find wildflowers, many bugs will enjoy herbs such as rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, sweet marjoram, chives, lovage, lemon balm, parsley, borage and mint.



Cowslip



Oxeye daisy



Field scabious

When your plants start to grow you might have to thin them out if they are too crowded but otherwise leave them alone apart from watering. Once the wildflowers have finished flowering don't cut them back or pull them up. Some wildflowers will flower again the next year, while others grow one year and flower the next.

Many bugs will have laid eggs in the compost, or hidden amongst the dead stems and leaves to hibernate over winter. Only tidy up small patches of ground at a time, rather than all at once, so bugs will have somewhere to live.

Other wildlife gardening tips

Bugs love an untidy garden; heaps of dead wood and leaves lying around the place are a source of food to some bugs and provide shelters for others. For many bugs a heap of autumn leaves is the ideal place to hibernate through the winter, but most people prefer their gardens tidy. If you prefer a tidy garden then why not leave a patch of untidiness or make a bug a hotel.

For more advice on attracting bugs to your garden visit

www.buglife.org.uk



Pile of leaves



Wood lice



Bumble Bee in a wild carrot seed head

Bug Project 1: Make your own wormery

Do you want to unmask the private lives of worms? If so read on, and we'll tell you how to make a simple worm observatory that will reveal their deepest stories.

Step one: Find two plastic bottles. The larger the bottles, the better, but one must be smaller than the other.

Step two: Buy a small bag of sand and a small bag of peat-free compost from a garden centre. Make sure the and you buy is horticultural sand and not builders sand

Step three. Make some drainage holes in the bottom of your large bottle then cut its top off and place the smaller bottle inside it. Fill the smaller bottle with cold water. This will help steady the bottle and keep the worms cool.

Step four: Fill the gap between the two bottles with alternating layers of sand and compost. When the gap is filled, gently water the layers with rainwater until they are moist.

Step five: Find some worms and place them in the gap - a dig in a garden should unearth some worms very quickly.

Step six: Leave the worms somewhere cool and dark for a couple of days then take them out and see what's happened. Hopefully you should see a lot. The disruption to the layers of sand and compost will show you where the worms have been digging and if you are lucky you will also see how they make their burrows.



Worms



Home made wormery
© Steven Arnott



Garden wormery for composting organic waste.

Bug Project 2 - Create a bug hotel

Bugs love an untidy garden: piles of dead wood and leaves lying around the place are a source of food to some bugs and provide shelter for others. For many bugs a heap of autumn leaves is the ideal place to hibernate through the winter.

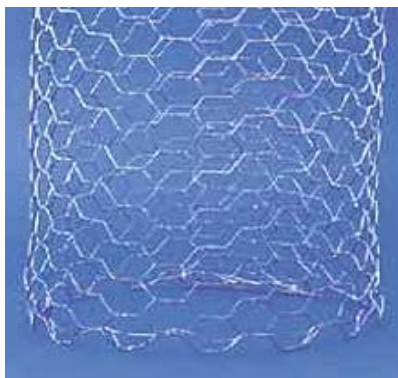
If you have a garden with no room for a bug-friendly patch of untidiness, why not make a bug hotel out of a 'tidy' leaf pile? All you need is some plastic mesh, some garden string, a flat piece of wood and a pile of leaves.

Most garden centres sell chicken-wire or plastic mesh by the metre. For our bug hotel we bought a one metre length of green plastic mesh, curled it into a tube and tied it in place using four twists of plastic covered garden wire.

When you have your cylinder take some dead plant stems or twigs and poke them through the sides of the cylinder at the bottom. The twigs overlap to form a mesh which stops the leaves falling out of the bottom of the cylinder if you pick it up; it also stops the leaves touching the ground and helps to stop them getting damp.

With the twigs in place you can fill the cylinder with dead leaves and put a piece of wood on top to stop the rain getting in (the wood has to be heavy so it won't blow away). As the leaves in the hotel dry-out they will shrink, so try to keep some extra ones to top-up the cylinder. If your garden is very windy it might be an idea to make some v-shaped staples out of coat-hanger wire and use them to pin the bottom of the cylinder to the ground.

Once you have made your hotel put it in a quiet corner of the garden - preferably somewhere in the shade. As the nights start getting colder, bugs will find your hotel and use it as a safe dry place to hibernate.



Chicken wire curled into a tube



Autumn leaves



A slightly grander bug hotel