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**Wildlife Gardening in Community Spaces**

*Thank you to Lucy Kennedy from STAA for providing the following information.*

For us, being based in a city environment, urban wildlife is really, really important. The greenest spaces we have in a city are our gardens. So, making those gardens as wildlife-friendly as possible creates numerous opportunities for connecting little corridors for animals, providing space, and offering a real mix of habitats in a way that works alongside people.

STAA is a charity based at St Ann's Allotments, a site in the middle of Nottingham, bordering St Ann's and Mapperley. It’s a large space where STAA manages four projects focusing on different types of wildlife, community, gardening, and heritage. We try to incorporate as much wildlife gardening as we can into these spaces, ensuring that people can experience the outdoors and nature.

Let's explore some of the different wildlife features that can be easily incorporated into any small community garden, small garden, or urban environment.

In wildlife gardening, the main elements we focus on are providing food, shelter, nesting materials, hiding places, and water. This can be achieved in many different ways. We can create lots of wild spaces, be organised about it, or get creative and make something beautiful. It’s all about making something that works for you.

**Providing food for wildlife**

One of the first things to do to make your space wildlife-friendly is to provide different types of food for wildlife. Being an allotment site, we love pollinators. To provide food for pollinators, you could plant a wildflower meadow or some lovely individual plants that are either wildflowers or garden plants. Look for different types of flowers for different insects: some prefer long flowers, others big flowers, different coloured flowers, and flowers that bloom over a long season.

Another thing we do is let some of our vegetables flower. For example, kale and onions are fantastic if you let a few flower and go to seed; they are great for pollinators. It’s also interesting to see what caterpillars of butterflies and moths eat and try to grow more of those plants to provide food for all life stages.

Providing food such as fruit, berries, seeds, and nuts is also beneficial. This can come from familiar fruit trees, brambles in hedges, or smaller trees like hawthorn, blackthorn, and dog rose. These plants will flower in summer and produce berries in autumn, offering food for various birds and mammals.

One of the best shrubs for wildlife here is hawthorn. It has early spring flowers that provide food for pollinators and later produces beautiful red haws that offer berries for many birds and mammals. Many flowers also turn into seeds, providing food for birds, particularly teasels and other flowers that give lots of autumn food for wildlife. Additionally, you can provide supplementary food with bird feeders, which are a joy to watch if you can see them from your window.

**Providing water**

Providing water for wildlife is crucial for many reasons. One of the best ways to do this is by creating ponds. We absolutely love ponds here and have many of different sizes and shapes, each attracting various wildlife. We have frogs and newts visiting and breeding in our ponds, and honeybees drinking from the shallower areas. Ponds can be any size, from a mini pond using a washing-up bowl or barrel to a small dish of water for ground animals and insects to drink from.

It’s important to ensure there is a way for wildlife to get out of the water. In ponds, this might be a ramp of logs or bricks, or even strings in water butts to help bees escape. Keeping water dishes and bird baths clean is also crucial to prevent the spread of diseases among animal visitors. It’s beneficial to have a mix of plants in your ponds, including gorgeous flowering pond plants. We manage our ponds by clearing out overgrowth once a year in autumn, removing leaves and debris to keep the ponds healthy and open.

**Creating habitat**

There are many different habitats you can create in your community space. We have a mix of woodland, wetland, and grassland habitats. In woodlands, we plant many native trees that provide food, nesting opportunities, and various habitats for insects. One of our favourite trees is the hazel tree, which is great for insects and produces hazelnuts and long sticks of wood used for gardening and building.

When managing woodlands, we might prune or thin the trees and create habitat piles from the removed wood, which become homes for fungi, insects, and small mammals. You can also create habitat piles from leaves or rocks, providing hiding places for hedgehogs and other animals.

In grasslands, you could let a patch of your lawn grow longer, revealing different types of grasses and flowers that offer hiding and nesting places for wildlife. Alternatively, you could plant a wildflower meadow in a sunny corner of your garden, providing food and shelter for insects and small mammals.

Wetlands, including ponds and other water features, are another important habitat. Even a boggy section with water-loving plants can be beneficial. Additionally, you can create wildlife features like bird boxes, bat boxes, hedgehog homes, bug hotels, and bee hotels, involving volunteers or community members in the process.

For a more unique habitat, you could dig a hibernaculum—a hole filled with habitat piles underground—providing shelter for amphibians and mammals. The key to creating wildlife habitats is variety: different heights, cool spots, warm spots, nooks, and crannies that will attract diverse wildlife.

**Planning your space**

Before you start, it's a good idea to make a plan. Look at the space you have, consult your user groups, and assess existing plants, sunlight, shade, and access issues. Use existing features like buildings, walls, or fences for vertical planting or nest boxes, and ensure there are ways for wildlife to enter, such as hedgehog holes.

Lastly, maintain your wildlife space in an eco-friendly manner. Use alternatives to pesticides, make your own compost or use peat-free compost, and design your garden for both people and wildlife. Ensure there are places to sit and enjoy nature. Every little thing you do will make a big difference, so choose a few wildlife-friendly practices that work for you and enjoy the evolving diversity in your garden each year.

**Learn more**

Learn more ways to Green Your Neighbourhood: <https://wildlifegardenproject.com/green-your-neighbourhood/>

To find out more about the topics in this document and much, much more, visit the Wildlife Trust’s Nextdoor Nature Hub: <https://nextdoornaturehub.org.uk/>

**About Green Your Neighbourhood**

With thanks to National Lottery players, we have launched an exciting new campaign, Green Your Neighbourhood!

Green Your Neighbourhood will allow us to help communities across the UK to create or enhance their local green space, and is being made possible thanks to a grant of £10,000 from [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/).

The Wildlife Garden Project has worked alongside [Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust](https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/)to film community groups involved in[Nextdoor Nature Nottingham](https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/nextdoor-nature), the Trust’s movement for nature, to launch a series of films and a national campaign. Our mission is to make it easy for people like you to take ownership of your local green space and take action that will benefit your local area, your community and wildlife.