6 Greening Your Garden

Introduction

If you are lucky enough to have a garden, no matter its size, you can make a positive contribution to our city's environment and **biodiversity**. Gardens allow us to interact with the natural environment, and gardening has been proven to help reduce stress and aid recovery from mental illness. However, sometimes our efforts at maintaining and improving our gardens are misguided. For example we can end up using too many harmful chemicals and wasting too much water.

There are a number of ways that you can improve your garden space and promote wildlife, whilst saving water at the same time. Your garden can also provide you with the opportunity for composting household waste, which can then be used to improve the soil in your garden.

Make Room for Wildlife

Our gardens make up a valuable living landscape for wildlife. With pressures on their natural habitats, some of our best-loved wildlife species like sparrows and hedgehogs are increasingly reliant on our gardens for food, shelter and water. Why not consider the following ways to improve your garden for wildlife?

- Consider adding a pond – it will attract frogs, toads, dragonflies and many bird species to drink and bathe. Even a sunken dustbin lid can be an oasis for wildlife.

  For more information on making your garden a haven for wildlife, visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/how-you-can-help/wildlife-gardening



Image: Jenny Steel

- Use plants that provide nectar for insects. The Royal Horticultural Society has a useful list of plants for pollinators that provide flowers all year round.

  For more information, visit www.rhs.org.uk



Image: Helen Brooks

Plant a hedge – it can provide interest as well as a shelter for wildlife.

Collect rainwater in a water butt and use it to water your garden.

Use a watering can instead of a sprinkler.

Avoid using pesticides. Control pests by encouraging their natural enemies.

From June onwards, let your grass grow a bit longer. It will stay greener for longer without the need for watering.

Consider adding a pond to your garden.



Add a compost bin. Compost can be used to improve your soil.

Try growing fruits and vegetables.

Plant a tree (if you do not already have one) – it will filter pollution and provide shelter for birds.

Attract birds to your garden with bird food and water on a bird table, or nesting boxes in safe spaces.

Ask your garden centre about the species of plants that require less water. It will save you time as well as water.

Use permeable hard surfaces.



Image: Jenny Steel

- Create some quiet wild patches to encourage wildlife, such as log-piles for insects. Leave some of your tidying up until the spring. Birds can eat seeds over winter and ladybirds like to shelter in dead flower stalks.
- Attract birds by putting out bird food and a saucer full of water, and put up nesting boxes in safe spots.

  For more information on the best nest box designs and locations to encourage different species, visit www.rspb.org.uk



Image: Jenny Steel

- Replace fencing with a hedge – a mixed hedge can provide colour and interest, plus food and shelter for wildlife.
- Consider planting a tree. Trees filter air pollution, shelter birds and keep streets shaded and cool. The Council offers free trees to mark the birth of a baby.

  For more information visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/trees-for-babies

Consider carefully what shrub or tree you plant. Some species could affect the structure of your or your neighbour's house with subsidence.

Contact the Council's Arboriculture (Tree) Team for advice on Tel: 01223 457200 or email trees@cambridge.gov.uk.

Organic Gardening

- The best way to control pests in the garden is to encourage their natural enemies. Birds, amphibians and hedgehogs eat slugs and snails, and ladybirds and hoverflies eat greenfly and their eggs.
- Avoid using slug pellets. They can kill hedgehogs and garden birds which eat the slugs, and even household pets.
- Planting disease-resistant varieties of roses and other plants will mean you do not have to use so many pesticides to keep them healthy.
- If you grow vegetables, **companion planting** can help reduce pest attacks. For example, marigolds and poached-egg plants attract ladybirds and hoverflies, which eat greenfly and other pests.
- **Mulching** your garden plants with grass clippings keeps down weeds, improves your soil and saves water by reducing evaporation.
- Use peat-free compost. Peat is a **finite resource** and many wildlife **habitats** are now threatened by peat extraction. Alternatives to peat include garden compost and leaf mould. Mushroom compost is widely available and often costs less than peat.

For more information on organic gardening, visit www.lowimpact.org and look at the factsheets in the 'Land' section.



Image: Jenny Steel

Water Use in Your Garden

- Install a water butt to collect water from your house, garage or shed roof to water your garden.
- Greywater from bathing or washing up can also be used for all but the most sensitive of garden plants. Do not use on soft fruit or vegetables you intend to eat.
- Try not to use sprinklers. If you must water your garden, remember infrequent watering is better than regular sprinkling as it encourages the roots to search for water.
- From June onwards mow grass less frequently. It will stay greener for longer without needing to be watered.
- Choose plants for their drought tolerance, for their compatibility with your soil and their intended position. Ask your local garden centre or nursery for advice.



Image: Melonstone / Dreamstime.com

Composting

Composting is an inexpensive, natural process that transforms your uncooked fruit, vegetable and garden waste into valuable food for your garden by returning important nutrients and minerals to the soil. Finished compost is great for using on flowerbeds, vegetable plots and



Image: WRAP

mixing into planters, and can really make your garden bloom. When used as mulch it can help suppress weeds and retain moisture in the soil. You can install a compost bin in your garden and recycle your garden and organic kitchen waste. Composting at home reduces the amount of rubbish you put out for collection.

Compost bins are available to Cambridge residents at discounted prices through the County recycling partnership, RECAP. Various sizes of bin are available, and delivery to your home address is free.

For more information, visit www.ccc.getcomposting.com

If you do not have enough garden compost to fill a compost bin, you could use a worm bin to make small quantities of good compost.

For information on how to make your own worm bin, visit www.recyclezone.org.uk/az_worms.aspx.html

Balconies, Roof Terraces and Window Boxes

However small your space is for gardening you can still follow many of the tips above. With more exposed sites such as balconies, roof terraces and window boxes, you will need to protect plants from wind and dehydration. Gather potted plants together to cut down on their water loss in the summer. If you are in a block of flats, try to persuade your neighbours to green their balconies at the same time as yours, and then you will provide a more worthwhile resource for birds, bumblebees and butterflies.

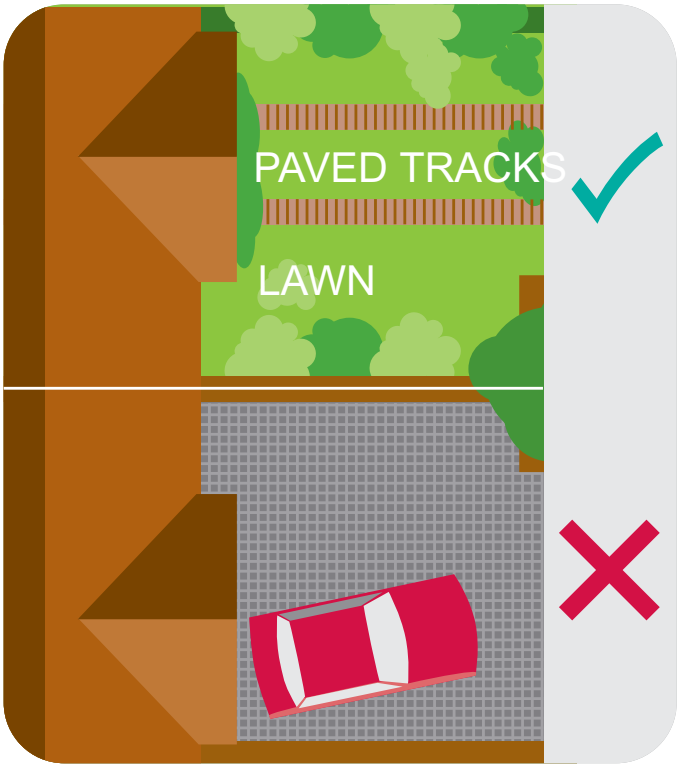
Front Gardens and Off Street Parking

There is an increasing trend of people paving over front gardens to park cars off the street. Disability access often means that this is the only option for some people, but the loss of garden space and street trees should be avoided if possible. If you do provide for parking, please make sure that environmental considerations are taken into account:

- Lay hard surfaces only on areas needed for parking. In most cases all that is needed is just paved tracks to take the car wheels
- Lay hard surfaces on a gradient to allow water to run onto soft landscape areas
- Use **permeable** hard surfaces where possible
- A cut off drainage channel should also be incorporated into the design to stop surface water from discharging across the public footway
- Planting areas should be laid out round the parking space. Some shrubs particularly suitable for front gardens are Forsythia, Lavender, Fishbone Cotoneaster and Honeysuckle. Suitable trees include Golden Robinia and Mountain Ash.

You will need planning permission to pave more than 5m2 of your front garden with non-permeable materials, and other circumstances may also require planning permission.

Contact the Planning Department for more information on Tel: 01223 457200.



Further Information

Wild About Gardens

Wild About Gardens is a joint project of the Royal Horticultural Society and The Wildlife Trusts. It aims to encourage and inspire people to take action for wildlife in their gardens.

Email: contactus@wildaboutgardens.org.uk
www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk

Garden Wildlife Health (GWH)

GWH is a collaborative project between the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Froglife and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) which aims to monitor the health of, and identify disease threats to, British wildlife. They count on the public to submit reports of sick or dead wildlife and samples for analysis.

Tel: 0207 449 6685
www.gardenwildlifehealth.org

British Hedgehog Preservation Society

The website of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society has a wealth of information about hedgehogs including what to feed them and what to do if you find one in daylight hours.

Tel: 01584 890801
Email: info@britishhedgehogs.org.uk.
www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

Butterfly Conservation

Butterfly Conservation is a British charity devoted to saving butterflies, moths and their habitats throughout the UK.

Tel: 01929 400209
Email: info@butterfly-conservation.org .
www.butterfly-conservation.org

Froglife

Froglife is the UK's only charity providing specific education and conservation projects on native amphibians and reptiles.

Tel: 01733 602102
Email info@froglife.org
www.froglife.org

Buglife

Buglife is the only organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates, and we are actively working to save Britain's rarest little animals, everything from bees to beetles, worms to woodlice and jumping spiders to jellyfish.

www.buglife.org.uk

Natural England

Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. It provides practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone.

Tel: 0845 600 3078
Email: enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk
www.naturalengland.org.uk

Front Gardens

The Royal Horticultural Society has produced advice on parking in front gardens.

www.rhs.org.uk/learning/research /gardeningmatters

Guidance on permeable surfacing of front gardens, published by Communities and Local Government, outlines national policy on paving front gardens.

www.communities.gov.uk/publications /planningandbuilding/pavingfrontgardens