**BIODIVERSE GARDENING**

In the UK, our patchwork of around 23 million different gardens provides an amazing opportunity to help wildlife and nature. The land they cover is bigger than all the United Kingdom’s national reserves put together and so the way we treat our little patch of land can have a huge impact on our fragile ecosystem.

Why do we need to do this?

Insects are the main drivers of our ecosystem and the biggest threat to them is believed to be intensive farming, as the use of pesticides and fertilisers are fatal to insects. In the countryside, hedgerows have been uprooted and fields are vast prairies of monoculture (a single crop) which leaves no room for a diverse insect population. Climate change is also playing a part. As natural environments dry out, many species can’t cope - hence insect populations are crashing.

2% of insects are already extinct.

40% of all insects are declining fast (remember driving along in the 70s and your windscreen was covered…). Now there is nothing!

The UK’s flying insect population has declined by around 60% in the last 20 years.

So, what can we gardeners do to help?

1. Just putting out a shallow bowl of water, with a few stones in it for pollinators to land on, can literally be a lifesaver for insects and small mammals.
2. Choose plants that feed hungry pollinators. Natural, native plants that have not been cross-bred, are vital for their food supply.
3. Introduce a pond! Even an old washing up bowl buried up to its neck in soil, is better than nothing. Put large stones in there with the very top above water, so that small mammals can climb out easily and won’t drown if they approach it for a drink. Frogs will quickly find it and they, in turn, will provide a natural way to obliterate slugs, snails and flies. Always make sure it is safe for children too.
4. Have a little wild area in the garden, a small pile of decaying wood is best. This provides warmth and shelter for beetles and other insects, which in turn, are a vital, natural food for birds and hedgehogs.
5. Leave the leaves! We have developed an obsession with tidy gardens. However, insects shelter in autumn’s fallen leaves and worms also drag them underground to give nutrients to the soil. If you rake up leaves and throw them away, you are literally throwing away all of your insects for next year.
6. Short, manicured lawns are a barren wasteland for insects. Leave lawns to grow for at least a month at a time, and add white clover as food for bees. Leave the edges of your lawn slightly longer to help wildlife and scatter bee-friendly flower seeds.
7. Start composting! Compost bins are available to buy from Redbridge Council and they have a 40% discount offer and free composting workshops for residents in the coming week. Kitchen peelings, grass cuttings, and cardboard are among the things you can put in your compost bin. It quickly makes top quality soil which is full of nutrients and is amazing for your garden. It also is a way of reducing what you send to landfill and therefore prevents damaging methane escaping from landfill sites.
8. Get a water barrel! This is a great way of storing a natural source of water which is not high in nitrates. This natural rainwater is so much better for ponds and bowls of water for animals and, of course, is better for the environment.
9. Bird feeders are a marvellous way of getting food to hungry birds. Fat balls are great in the spring and seeds are best during the winter.
10. Having a tree in your garden is a wonderful addition for wildlife, whilst growing hedges in urban areas is the best way to help birds, as they provide a safe shelter. Take care not to strim hedges between March and August, as birds may be nesting.
11. Last, and most importantly, poisons and pesticides have no place in our gardens. They kill far more than the weeds and ‘pests’ that annoy us. We need to work with nature, not against it!

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