



## Conservation Gardening

That the world is becoming increasingly polluted and less capable of supporting life can hardly be disputed since almost daily we hear new stories of Rain Forest destruction, holes in the ozone layer, acid rain, etc. etc. It is important to realise that this is not only happening in other countries, in Britain the tiny remnants of our own ancient woodland continue to be destroyed, current agricultural practices mean that top soil is being lost at an alarming rate, the weather forecast now includes details on air quality and we are often told not to spend too long in the sun for fear of getting skin cancer. It all makes depressing reading and we can only too easily become despondent with a feeling of powerlessness.



Yet, of course, we can all make positive contributions towards cleaning up the planet and by our own actions try to encourage others to follow suit. Firstly we should adapt our own lifestyles in order to reduce to a minimum our personal contribution to the problem. There are many ways we can do this, such as using the car less, choosing instead to walk, cycle or use public transport where possible; insulating our homes to make them more fuel efficient; avoiding buying over-packaged products or disposable goods such as throw-away razors; recycling our own waste by composting organic matter, taking glass, newspapers, used clothing, etc to a recycling centre; and by buying organic food wherever possible.

If we have access to some land, even if it is just a small backyard, then we can each make some very positive contributions towards improving the quality of life on this planet. By giving up artificial fertilisers and sprays, using composts and biological methods instead, we will help to create a cleaner mini-environment for ourselves and the other creatures who share our garden. If we can then create habitats for these other creatures we can gradually build up a natural balance of predators to keep the garden pests under control, thus reducing our need to use even organic sprays on our plants. One of the best ways of doing this is to plant some trees, preferably native, and ideally containing a mixture of those trees found in our local woods (especially Oak). Of course, trees take up a lot of space but there are many quite small trees suitable for very small gardens. Trees provide habitats for insects, birds and mammals. Their roots go deep into the earth bringing up nutrients and water that would otherwise be lost from the garden. Their dead leaves can be turned into leaf mould which is an excellent soil conditioner, trees extract carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, converting it into wood and giving out oxygen, thus helping to counter global warming. Trees can provide us with fruits, nuts, edible leaves and many other products and trees look so beautiful. For larger plantings it is often possible to obtain free trees from Local Councils - if you have at least half a hectare of land then you can obtain a grant from the Forestry Commission. See also [Edible Shrubs](#)

A pond can really enhance a garden - it can also provide a home for frogs and toads who will then more than pay their rent by eating many of the slugs in the garden. The pond can range in size from just a few square feet to as large as you like. An old bath can be buried in the ground and used or you can buy pond liners or pre-formed ponds. It is best not to have fish in a pond if you want amphibians since the fish will eat the spawn and tadpoles. There are, however, many useful plants that can be grown in a pond - see our leaflet [The Edible Pond](#) for more details.

Hedges can provide you with shelter, they can also shelter and feed a wide range of other creatures. Native species are, on the whole, better for conservation gardening but many other fruiting hedge plants can be used to provide food for birds (and humans) throughout the year. Some examples include:-

Native

Hawthorn, Holly, Sloe and Hazel.

Non-native

Barberries, Elaeagnus species, Cotoneaster, Pyracantha and Rosa Rugosa.

See our leaflet [Hedges](#) for more details.

Most gardens have a lawn and if some of this can be seeded with native wild flowers and then only be cut from August once seeds have been set, it will provide a wonderful habitat for butterflies, as well as provide a focal part for the garden in spring and early summer. The mowings should be removed to keep soil fertility low in order to encourage the flowers and discourage too lush a growth of grass. These mowings, of course, provide an excellent source of organic matter for the compost heap. See [The Edible Lawn](#)

Try to grow plants in the garden that provide food for insects, butterflies, birds and mammals. Evening Primroses are excellent for moths, Buddleia and Oregano will attract clouds of butterflies to the garden, fruiting shrubs such as Cotoneaster, Barberry and Juneberry will act as magnets to birds, our native Ivy will provide a late source of nectar for the bees and shelter for birds and insects. Try not to keep the garden too tidy - dead flowering stems have their own beauty in winter, their seeds can be eaten by birds whilst ladybirds can hibernate on (or in) them. As you turn your garden more and more into a conservation area, then you will probably attract hedgehogs into it. Whatever slugs the frogs and toads don't find - the hedgehogs will!

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