



Wild About Gardens

#wildaboutgardens

wildaboutgardens.org.uk



Big or small,
ponds for all



Why a pond?

Adding a pond is one of the best things you can do for wildlife in your garden

We're losing our ponds, rivers and streams at a rapid rate. The loss or degradation of these places – to development, drainage and intensive farming – is linked to a huge decline in wildlife, from frogs and toads, to water voles and insects.

How you can help

Not all is lost. There is a lot we can do in our own gardens and communities to help. Even a small pond can be home to an interesting range of wildlife, including damsel and dragonflies, frogs and newts. It could also become a feeding ground for birds, hedgehogs and bats – the best natural garden pest controllers!

Think big, start small

Your pond needn't be big. A washing-up bowl, a large plant pot, or a disused sink could all be repurposed as ponds, providing you make sure creatures can get in and out. See page 5 for a step-by-step on making your pond.

As underwater larvae, **dragonflies will eat any animal smaller than themselves**, including tadpoles.

Dragonflies have extremely good vision, making them **great predators** of smaller flying insects.

When resting, **dragonflies hold their wings out flat** from their body, like a plane, while **damsel flies fold their wings up** behind them.

Frogs have the ability to **breathe through their skin**, which lets them stay under water without drowning.

Amphibians travel to find the best home, **often up to 500m from their breeding site**.

Did you know?

Fish are **voracious eaters of newt eggs and frog spawn** and can have a negative effect on the nature of a garden pond.

A healthy garden pond is likely to support **a greater range of wildlife than any other feature in your garden**.

The tropical waterlily, **Victoria amazonica**, has leaves that **grow up to 15cm per day** to a total of up to **3m in diameter**.

Mini ponds



If you don't think you have space for a pond, think again

Mini ponds are incredibly valuable for wildlife, and a network of small ponds in a neighbourhood could be better than just a few large ones. Not only that but they are cheap, easy to create and even easier to take care of. Mini ponds can be constructed from a whole range of containers!

Your upcycled pond

Your pond will need a wide 'neck' so wildlife can get in and out. Other than that, the shape really doesn't matter! Sink your pond or add a ramp for creatures to access. Be creative – is there anything that you could upcycle, such as a washing-up bowl, wheelbarrow basin, sawn-off plastic dustbin, half barrel, rubber trug, large plant pot or sink?



How to build a mini wildlife pond

You will need:

- a watertight container*
- old bricks, rocks and pebbles
- pond plants
- spade

* Is there anything that you can upcycle? It could be an old washing-up bowl, sink or even a plant pot. Aim for 20-30cm deep.

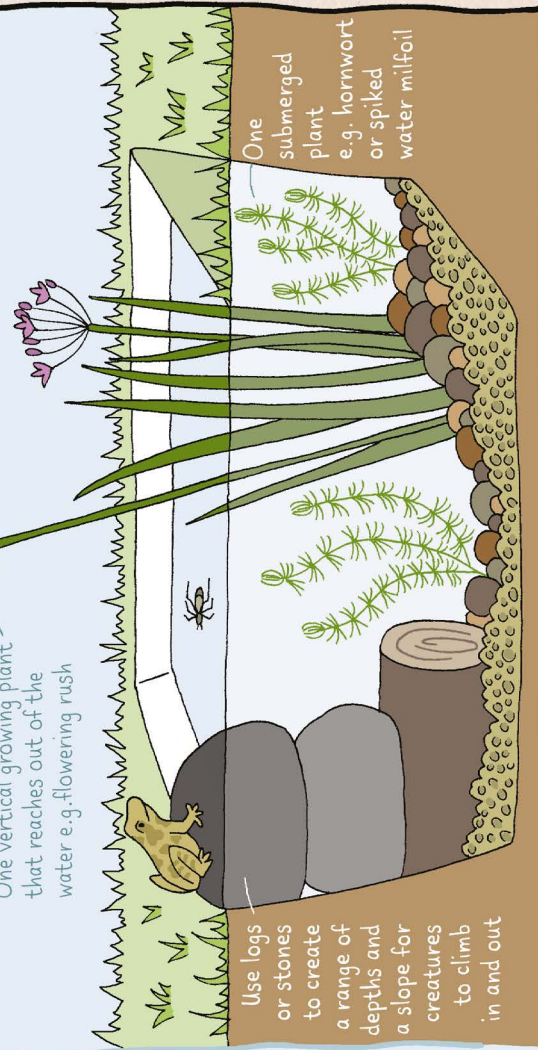
- 1 Choose a spot. Your pond will need light, but not full sunlight all day. You can dig a hole and sink your container, or just leave it sitting on top.
- 2 If the container isn't watertight, eg. an old plant pot, then add a piece of pond liner.

- 3 Add a layer of gravel and rocks.
- 4 Fill your pond with rainwater (tap water contains chemicals).
- 5 Start planting... you only need two or three plants.
- 6 Now watch and wait! Wildlife will come to your pond of its own accord.

One vertical growing plant that reaches out of the water e.g. flowering rush

Use logs or stones to create a range of depths and a slope for creatures to climb in and out

One submerged plant e.g. hornwort or spiked water milfoil



Don't introduce frogs, fish or even water from another pond as this can spread disease.

Planting your pond

Plants are an important part of your wildlife pond, oxygenating the water and providing food and shelter. Use UK native species where possible.

The basics

Growing pond plants in containers is a good option for a smaller pond as it keeps them from spreading. Aquatic baskets usually have lattice sides to allow water, air and other gases to flow through. Unless the mesh is very fine, they should also be lined with hessian or fabric to prevent the soil washing out.

- Choose an aquatic compost or use a mix of sand and gravel.
- To stabilise taller plants place large rocks and stones in the base of containers.
- Plants should be planted to the same soil-depth as in the original container.
- Firm plants in well and then apply a thin layer of grit or fine gravel.
- Floating plants can be placed gently on the water's surface. Separate large clumps and aim for one plant per square metre.



At the edge:

These plants are good for shallower parts and edges of your pond (up to a water depth of 5cm).

Marsh marigold (*AGM)

(*Caltha palustris*)

Large golden flowers in March

Water plantain

(*Alisma plantago-aquatica*)

May overwhelm small ponds

Lesser spearwort

(*Ranunculus flammula*)

Bright yellow flowers, bold blue-green leaves

Water forget-me-not

(*Myosotis scorpioides*)

Blue flowers in May.

Floating plants and waterlilies:

These plants offer a perch for animals such as frogs and bees.

Frogbit

(*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*)

Small white flowers

Water soldier

(*Stratiotes aloides*)

Floats just below surface.

May overwhelm small ponds

White waterlily

(*Nymphaea alba*)

Only suitable for larger ponds.

Submerged plants:

Otherwise known as oxygenators, they will keep your water healthy. They are not essential for a small pond.

Water-crowfoot

(*Ranunculus aquatilis*)

White flowers in May

Water violet

(*Hottonia palustris*)

Lilac flowers in summer

Pillwort

(*Pilularia globulifera*)

Willow moss

(*Fontinalis antipyretica*)

Best planted attached to a stone.

Plants for small ponds:

Miniature waterlily (*AGM)

(*Nymphaea* 'Pygmaea Helvola')

Lesser spearwort

(*Ranunculus flammula*)

Starwort

(*Callitriche stagnalis*)

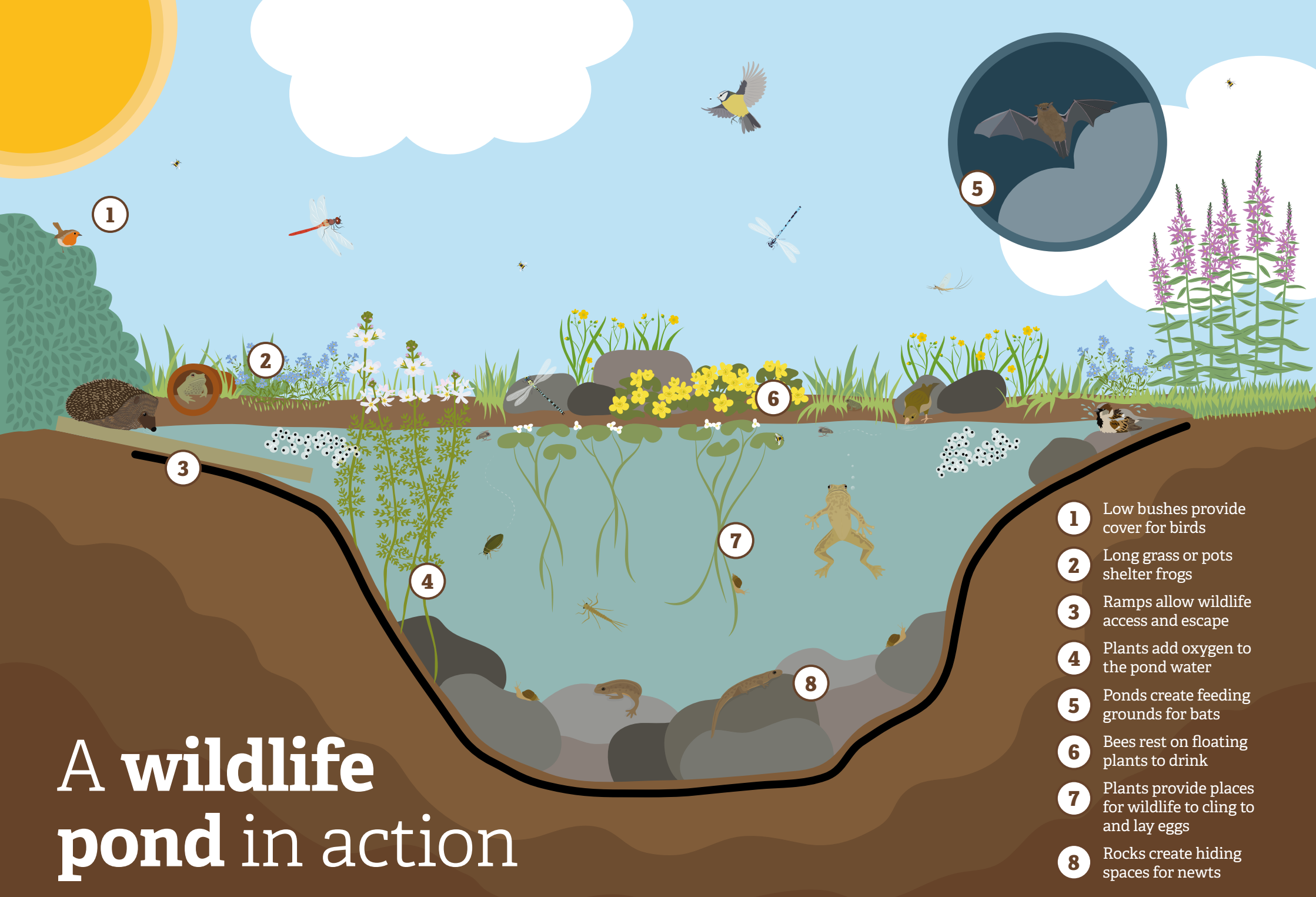
Flowering rush

(*Butomus umbellatus*).

*AGM

RHS Award of Garden Merit












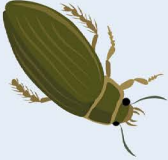


A wildlife pond in action

- 1 Low bushes provide cover for birds
- 2 Long grass or pots shelter frogs
- 3 Ramps allow wildlife access and escape
- 4 Plants add oxygen to the pond water
- 5 Ponds create feeding grounds for bats
- 6 Bees rest on floating plants to drink
- 7 Plants provide places for wildlife to cling to and lay eggs
- 8 Rocks create hiding spaces for newts

Pond identification

Illustration: Corinne Welch
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Froglet		<input type="checkbox"/> Common blue damselfly		<input type="checkbox"/> Smooth newt		<input type="checkbox"/> Mayfly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Common darter dragonfly		<input type="checkbox"/> Pond skater		<input type="checkbox"/> Water snail		<input type="checkbox"/> Toad
	<input type="checkbox"/> Water boatman		<input type="checkbox"/> Great diving beetle				

Make a wildlife pond

Illustration: Corinne Welch
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You will need

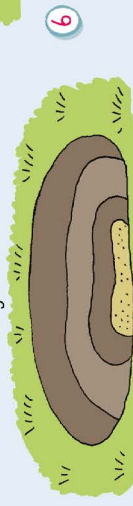
- A big patch of garden
- Spade
- A plank of wood
- Spirit level
- Butyl pond liner
- Sand
- Rainwater
- A variety of pond plants
- Large rocks

Remember: don't add fish or a pump. The fish will eat smaller life forms (including frog and newt larvae) while the pump may suck them up!

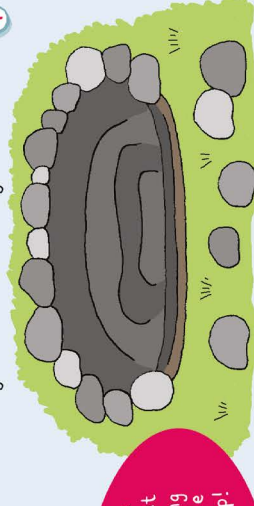
- 1 Choose your spot.* Draw your pond outline and dig out, including some shallow areas.



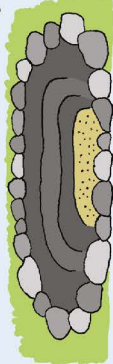
- 2 Put a layer of sand at the bottom (don't use it all, you'll need some later).



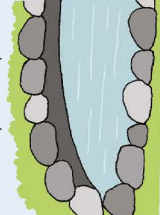
- 3 Make a trench all around the edge of your pond, and lay the edge of the liner into this. Weigh it down with large rocks.



- 4 Fill the bottom with the remaining sand.



- 5 Fill the pond up with water.



- 6 Begin adding your plants.



- 7 Watch and see what wildlife visits.

Make sure you add a plank of wood, or something similar, as a ramp to help any wildlife that may have fallen in.



* Look for a spot with plenty of sun, ideally with some shade in the afternoon. Try to avoid trees nearby, as fallen leaves can block up a pond.

Looking after your pond year-round

Spring

Put in barley straw pads to help reduce problems with algae. Try not to disturb your pond too much at this time, there is a lot of activity below the surface. Introduce any new plants where needed from mid-spring. You can divide plants and compost any excess.

Summer

Evaporation is normal, but if water levels drop low, top it up with rain water. Keep grass around the pond long to shelter young frogs.

Cut back vigorous plants and remove duckweed. Blanketweed can also be pulled out in small amounts at a time, but be careful to check for trapped newts, water boatmen, or other creatures. If you notice this, swirl the weeds in a bucket with pond water before adding the wildlife back to the pond.

Autumn

If you need to carry out any maintenance work, such as removing silt, do it now while the pond is less active. Plants will also die back at this time. Allow the pond enough light by removing excess fallen leaves and cutting back overhanging branches.



Winter

Freezing over is normal and unlikely to reduce oxygen levels too much in a healthy pond. A mini pond could be insulated with bubble wrap, kept close to the house, or sunk into the ground to help prevent it freezing. Avoid smashing the ice as shards could cause damage.

If your pond is the only drinking source for wildlife then leave a ball in the water to keep an ice free section near the edge. Alternatively melt a hole by holding a pan of hot water on the surface. Brush off any fallen snow from the surface of your pond to allow light to reach the water.





Your top pond tips

Don't want a pond? **There are other things you can do**

- 1 Dig a shallow channel or hollow which will allow excess rainwater to pool. This will slow storm water run-off and add wildlife habitat to your garden.
- 2 Fill saucers and bird baths with water for wildlife to have a drink or a splash; add marbles or stones to a shallow water dish to allow a perch for bees.
- 3 Visit a pond near to you and check out what wildlife is living there. Let us know what you've spotted!
- 4 Make a mini bog garden as a low maintenance alternative to a pond. Simply fill your container or space with soil and plant it with marginal plants from p.7. Visit www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk for more info.



1. **Safety first:**
If you are worried about **smaller people or pets, consider covering your pond with a wire grid** that also allows frogs in and out, or if it is larger, a fence to surround it. **Avoid netting as animals might get caught.**

2. **Sharing's not caring:**
Avoid sharing water between ponds, as this can **transfer disease or invasive species.**

3. **Leave the fish:**
It's best **not to add fish** to your pond as **they can pollute the water** and eat the other plant and animals.

4. **Timed splash:**
You can start your pond at any time of the year, **but if you do it in autumn or winter it will be ready** for the flurry of activity **in the spring.**

5. **How big?**
A 2m by 2m and 60cm deep garden pond is perfect for overwintering frogs. A mini pond 20-30cm-deep will also be valuable for wildlife.

6. **Beat the blanketweed:**
Adding lavender or barley straw to your pond in spring can help keep it **free of algae and blanketweed.** Remove the straw at the **end of the season** to avoid it rotting.

About Us

The Wildlife Trusts and the RHS set up Wild About Gardens to celebrate wildlife gardening and to encourage people to act for nature. Over the past 50 years we've seen declines in two thirds of the UK's plant and animal species. Many of our common garden visitors – including hedgehogs, house sparrows and starlings – are increasingly under threat.

To discover more about wildlife gardening and creating the perfect pond for you visit us online. You can also sign up to our monthly newsletter or follow us on social media to receive updates and ideas on all things wild about gardens.



wildaboutgardens.org.uk | facebook.com/groups/WildAboutGardens



The Wildlife Trusts

No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about the natural world and saving, protecting and standing up for wildlife and wild places near you. We believe that people are a part of nature; everything we value ultimately comes from it and everything we do has an impact on it.

Supported by more than 800,000 members, together The Wildlife Trusts care for 2,300 diverse and beautiful nature reserves. The nature reserves we look after are home to ancient undisturbed soils, and our members help us to protect them. We work to inspire and empower people to take action in their lives to help wildlife.

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 [thewildlifetrusts](https://www.instagram.com/thewildlifetrusts)

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The Royal Horticultural Society

For more than 210 years, the RHS has been the force behind gardening in the UK. Our aim is to enrich everyone's life through plants, and to make the UK a greener and more beautiful place. We believe everyone in every village, town and city should benefit from growing – for stronger, healthier and happier communities.

Our work in education, science and communities is only possible thanks to the generous support of our visitors, members, partners, donors and sponsors. With your help we can harness the power of horticulture, one gardener at a time.

email: membership@rhs.org.uk

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