



# The Nature of Gardens

OUR GARDENS CAN BE GOOD FOR NATURE AND THAT'S GOOD FOR US

ONE PLANET HOME 



**B&Q**

# Introduction

**People versus nature. That story of conflict lies at the heart of all our concerns about the environment, sustainability and the future of our one shared planet.**

Yet in one familiar space, very close to home, there is a more hopeful story to be told. Our gardens are an increasingly important refuge for the UK's wildlife. They do good for nature but, just as importantly, gardens are the prime locations where nature does good for us.

Gardens can engage us with the natural world from hour to hour and season to season, helping us to learn more about nature and become better planetary guardians as a result.

This report summarises the latest evidence on gardens and wildlife in the UK, drawing on extensive scientific research. It looks into why and how our gardens are good for plants and animals. It considers how gardens are gradually changing and how we could manage them to deliver greater benefits for wildlife.

It draws on new quantitative and qualitative consumer research commissioned by B&Q, the UK's leading home improvement and garden living retailer. This examined people's attitudes towards supporting and engaging with wildlife and the environment, seen through the lens of their gardening, with a focus on what prevented them doing more.

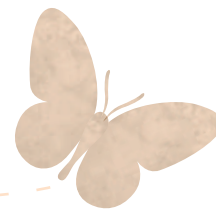
It's easy to feel a bit powerless when it comes to saving the planet. But we can all do something to protect nature right outside our own homes.

Rachel Bradley commented "At B&Q, we've been helping people to support wildlife in their gardens for years, through advice and products ranging from pollinator-friendly flowers to pond liners. But until we commissioned this report we didn't realise quite how important our gardens could be for nature. We're delighted to find so much evidence that garden wildlife and greenery is good for children and grown-ups in so many different ways. We want to help everyone to do a bit more to support nature right outside their homes, and to enjoy it more too. That's the aim of our top ten tips."

B&Q commissioned Nicholas Schoon, Bioregional's policy and communications manager, to research and write this report. Bioregional is a charity and social enterprise which champions a better, more sustainable way to live, working with partners across the globe to create better places for people to live, work and do business. It helped B&Q develop its award-winning One Planet Home programme in 2007 and has been working with the company ever since, helping it to realise its sustainability ambitions.

[www.bioregional.com](http://www.bioregional.com).

Nicholas was the environment correspondent of The Independent newspaper. A long time ago he gained a degree in zoology at Oxford.



**Rachel Bradley**  
Sustainability Manager, B&Q PLC



**Nicholas Schoon**  
Bioregional's Policy and Communications Manager





There are  
29 million  
trees 

in our gardens -  
nearly a 1/4  
of all trees found  
outside  
woodlands  
and forest in the uk

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Hedgehogs  
numbers in  
the UK may have  
halved since  
 2000

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Birds, bees,  
butterflies  
and hedgehogs  
are Britain's  
most  
wanted  
wildlife

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64% are  
concerned  
about wildlife  
in Britain

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63%   
believe that we  
all benefit  
from bringing  
wildlife  
closer to home

74%  
of 5-12  
year olds  
play outside  
for less  
than 1 hour per day

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24 million  
 gardens  
in the UK,  
nearly as large  
as Norfolk

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Small gardens  
are the norm yet  
 1 in 5  
with small gardens  
say they do nothing for  
wildlife

 Biggest  
perceived  
barriers are  
time, space  
money,  
and a lack of  
knowledge

Our top ten tips to help garden wildlife, tailored for the UK.

TWEET  
TWEET

1.  
LOOK OUT  
for wildlife and  
SHARE   
your discoveries



2.  
Pop up a  
BIRD CAFÉ



3.  
PLANT  
for pollinators

4.  
Give  
WILDLIFE  
some  
SHELTER



5.  
Get  
NATURE  
SAVVY  
with your shopping





6.

**JUST ADD  
WATER**

by constructing  
a pond or creating  
a bird bath

7.

**MAX  
out the  
GREEN**

with trees  
and shrubs

8.

Help  
**WILDFLOWERS  
FLOURISH**

9.

Open  
**HEDGEHOG  
GATEWAYS**

at the bottom  
of your fence

10.

Make your  
**CAT  
safe and  
SEEN**

to reduce  
threat to wildlife

MEOW

For more information about  
our top ten tips to help bring  
wildlife closer to home, turn  
over to page 07.

# Summary



**We care about wildlife but most of us don't know how to help. Yet it's easy and rewarding to bring nature closer to home and everybody can do it.**

Interest in, and concern for wildlife is almost a national characteristic. But as much as we are aware and concerned, most of us feel powerless to help.

Inspired by the *State of Nature 2016* report and to mark ten years of One Planet Home at B&Q we have dug into the potential for gardens to help everyone do something valuable and tangible in support of wildlife.

The *State of Nature 2016* shone a light on the fact that our own British wildlife remains under serious threat after decades of decline. Our specially commissioned review of the scientific evidence on gardens and wildlife by sustainability specialists and our long-term partner Bioregional shows that gardens are an increasingly important refuge for our beleaguered wildlife. And it shows that helping our local wildlife is far easier, more accessible and rewarding than most of us realise.

The UK is home to 24 million gardens, and many more outdoor spaces like balconies and door steps that can support wildlife and our own wellbeing. At B&Q we want to help people get the most out of their outdoor space. We believe that looking out for and welcoming nature into our gardens is key to that.

## 1/3

or more of the UK populations of house sparrows, starlings, blackbirds and greenfinches live alongside us in towns, cities and villages.

## 63%

of us believe that there are real benefits for ourselves in bringing more nature into our gardens.



Through a specially commissioned YouGov survey we learned that 64% of people are concerned about British wildlife. Our research has uncovered that gardens already accommodate thousands of species including 45 of the UK's priority species.

They provide significant habitat for several species in decline across the UK including the song thrush, starling, sparrow, common toad, hedgehog and stag beetle.

Most people are unsure about what they can do and those with smaller outdoor spaces feel particularly powerless.

83% of the UK population live in towns and cities, where gardens make up about a quarter of the total land area. Our gardens are tending to get smaller, increasingly covered in hard surfaces and at the same time we also want them to work harder for us. People said that they love to welcome wildlife into their gardens but few are confident gardeners, many are worried about doing anything that might harm nature and feel disheartened when they try things that don't work.

Taking action to support wildlife locally can have surprising benefits for us too. 63% of us believe that there are real benefits for ourselves in bringing more nature into our gardens - from the enjoyment seeing wildlife brings to the sense of having done something good for the environment.

In interviews people talked about the educational value and real sense of wonder and fun connecting with nature delivers for children. In particular people want to see more birds (71%), pollinators (59%) and hedgehogs (59%) in their gardens.

And our review of the scientific evidence confirms that the benefits of connecting with wildlife are extensive from better educational attainment, a better sense of wellbeing and better long term mental and physical health. But people also claim that a lack of time (24%), money (23%), knowledge (23%) and space (22%) prevents them from doing more to bring wildlife to their gardens.

1 in 5 people with small gardens say they are doing nothing to support wildlife. Given that small gardens are the most numerous, it is vital that we mobilise people into action. We hope that this report will highlight the real value our patchwork of gardens could provide for wildlife, and that our list of carefully developed tips to get started will show how quick, affordable, easy and rewarding small steps can be.

Making our outdoor space more appealing to nature by providing places to shelter and breed as well as to forage and feed is remarkably easy to do. It seems that the more you look and do, the more you will find and the happier and healthier it can make you.

## B&Q's Simple Steps to Bringing Wildlife Closer to Home.

### 1. Look out for wildlife & share your discoveries

- Becoming a citizen scientist by taking part in wildlife surveys is a great free way to become more aware of what's already out there.
- The more you talk about what you are doing, what you have seen and encourage others to join in the more fun it becomes.

### 2. Pop up a bird café

- Offering food and water is the fastest easiest way to attract new visitors to your space.

### 3. Plant for pollinators

- Nothing says summer like the sound of bees buzzing and sight of butterflies – fragrant flowers in a pot or a bed are an irresistible addition.

### 4. Give wildlife some shelter

- A log pile is great for butterflies, bug houses provide homes for mini beasts, a leaf pile for hedgehogs or install a bird or bat box – for best results make sure you are careful with positioning.

### 5. Get nature savvy with your shopping

- Use fewer garden chemicals.
- Look out for pollinator attracting plants.
- Insist on forest friendly wood and peat free composts to help nature near and far.

### 6. Just add water

- A pond can be any size, even a buried bowl can provide a home for various mini-bugs and insects like damsel flies.
- Constructing a pond using a preformed shape or flexible liner will give much greater variety. Create shallows so that plant life can flourish and allow wildlife to enter and leave. *But don't have a pond if you have small children around.*
- A bird bath provides water for birds to bathe and drink.

### 7. Max out the green

- Nurture what trees and shrubs you have and bring more in wherever possible. Nature needs habitats at all levels so trees are fabulous but climbers are super space efficient.

### 8. Help wildflowers flourish

- Plant a mini meadow in a pot, wildflowers in your borders or just spare a patch of lawn to let the grass and flowers grow long.

### 9. Open hedgehog gateways at the bottom of your fence

- One of our most loved species, hedgehogs love to roam, but fencing can be a barrier. Creating a gateway either in or below your fence will make life easier for them.

### 10. Make your cat safe and seen

- The UK is home to 7.5 million cats. Cats can be a threat to wildlife but a bright collar and bell can reduce risk, as can keeping them indoors from one hour before sunset until one hour after sunrise.



# Thank you

**We are grateful to four leading organisations in wildlife and gardening for reviewing our report and helping to improve it.**

## **RSPB**

"Our gardens are incredibly important for wildlife. Each green space can make a difference, from a window box full of pollen rich plants for bumblebees to a small pond hosting a whole range of different species. The RSPB is calling on people to help save nature by getting involved in Giving Nature a Home, and doing at least one action for wildlife in their garden, outdoor space or beyond."



## **Butterfly Conservation**

"This report provides a timely and encouraging summary of all that's great and good about our gardens - but it also serves as a reminder about where we have been losing our way with applying too much control in gardening. With urban butterfly numbers falling by almost three quarters in the last 20 years, it's time to put into practice some of the fantastic advice in this report and to nurture our gardens as wildlife havens for everyone to enjoy".



## **Royal Horticultural Society**

"As the largest UK gardening charity the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) is really pleased to see a retailer taking a leadership approach to safeguarding wildlife through this report. With the increasing pressure on our natural environment and our growing urbanised population there has never been such an important time for gardeners to help wildlife thrive and for their gardens to act as additional refuges for nature. There also some health benefits for us too!

With around 400,000 garden plants, more than 22 million gardens and half of the population actively gardening we can all really make a difference by providing connectivity, food, and shelter for wildlife.

This potential can be unlocked by getting involved in gardening for wildlife through Greening Grey Britain ([www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/greening-grey-britain](http://www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/greening-grey-britain)) and through growing plants that are perfect for pollinators ([www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/encourage-wildlife-to-your-garden/plants-for-pollinators](http://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/encourage-wildlife-to-your-garden/plants-for-pollinators))".



## **Wildlife Trusts**

"This is an excellent report which we support and can recommend. There are reasons to be cheerful. The evidence is overwhelming: Gardeners can and do make a major contribution to wildlife. And by taking a few simple, cheap and easy steps we can make our gardens even more friendly for wildlife. What's more, it also does us good and can provide endless pleasure."

