

Protecting hedgehogs

Hedgehog numbers are in decline, and it is important that we do everything we can to help give them a safe home to thrive again. After the *State of Britain's Hedgehogs* report was published in February 2018, we know that hedgehog numbers in the UK have fallen by around 50% since the start of the century.

In short, there's no better time to do our bit to make sure our gardens are hedgehog-friendly and, for that matter, are safe havens for *all* wildlife.



Encouraging hedgehogs

There are a number of ways you can give hedgehogs a home in your garden. Making sure they have lots of thick dense undergrowth and a variety of lengths of grass to hide and nest in is always good. You can also make your garden a hot spot for the slugs, snails and bugs that hedgehogs like to munch on.

1. Create hedgehog highways

Hedgehogs travel up to one mile every night, so they need to be able to roam freely. The best way to ensure hedgehogs have travel rights is to team up with your neighbours and extend the highway within your community. Create holes or gaps between fences so hedgehogs can travel from one garden to another. Visit hedgehogstreet.org for more info.

2. Add a hedgehog house

You can buy a ready-built house like the one below, or you can build your own house based on an original design or create a more makeshift option using a pile of logs. Simply pile the logs in an unordered fashion and pad out the gaps with leaves. Log piles are great, not only do they provide shelter, they also provide food as they attract bugs and insects and they look pretty and natural.



Once you've got your box and you're ready to find a place for it in your garden, here are a few things to think about:

- Place the box out of direct sunlight, with the entrance facing away from prevailing winds.
- Put it in cover, under thick vegetation for example, or under the garden shed.
- If you know where a hedgehog has built its own nest in the past, consider putting your new one there, or in a similar environment.
- Resist the temptation to keep removing the lid to check if the box is being used. It is always best not to disturb any potential hedgehog residents.

3. Leave out water

Leaving clean water in small dishes around the garden is good for lots of wildlife if they pass through, especially in very cold months where most water is frozen at night. Leave a dish close to your hedgehog house.

4. Make a feeding station

If you want to make sure the snacks are not eaten by other animals, cut a hedgehog-size hole in the end of a Tupperware, turn it upside down and secure it to the ground with a weight or tent pegs. Put the food underneath the Tupperware and only hedgehog should be able to reach it.

Never feed hedgehogs milk or bread, they can't digest them - it upsets their stomachs. A particular favourite is hedgehog food, complete cat biscuits or meaty cat or dog food.



5. Leave them alone during hibernation

It's sometimes hard to know if you have a hedgehog hibernating in your garden – this happens between November and March – but, if you do, make sure you leave it alone.