

IDEAS TO TRY *in your garden*



Feathered friends

Give the birds in your garden a helping hand this winter – not only will you help them survive the harder months, but you'll learn so much about the behaviour and habitats of all the wildlife in your garden

During the cold winter months it can be a struggle for garden birds to find food to sustain them and keep them warm. Therefore from late autumn through to mid-spring, regular supplies of food with a high fat content are invaluable.

Fat blocks in wire cages (rather than plastic netting) are ideal, and peanut cakes, insect cakes, grain mixes and nuts will ensure a balanced diet for lots of different birds such as starlings, tits and sparrows. You can provide for ground-feeding birds by placing feed mixes on low-hanging wire mesh, and blackbirds and thrushes will enjoy over-ripe fruit and raisins scattered over the ground.

A water supply is also essential for drinking and bathing. Replace water every day and clean

the bird bath once a week by scrubbing the sides and bottom to remove algae and dirt. During winter, try floating a small object like a ping pong ball on the surface to stop it from freezing over.

If you have nest boxes in your garden, now is the time to clean them out to ensure they're parasite- and fungi-free. Small birds such as wrens may use them as a communal shelter to keep warm and dry over the next few months. The easiest way to clean them out is to remove the old nesting material (wear gloves and a face mask to avoid breathing in dust) and any unhatched eggs, before dousing the box in boiling water. When thoroughly dry, pop some wool or hay inside, and you've made the perfect winter haven.



Top tips for top care



- 1 You could try removing a small section of the bottom of your garden fence to create an access hole for hedgehogs and frogs.
- 2 Make a bug hotel by adding a small stack of logs (unpainted, unstained wood will do) to a corner of the garden. This will provide shelter for woodlice, beetles, ladybirds and spiders.
- 3 Provide a shallow dish of water at ground level for passing wildlife.
- 4 Keep pruning to a minimum so insects, birds and small mammals have somewhere to shelter.
- 5 Leave some leaf litter for insects, hedgehogs, toads and newts to hide in. It may look a little messy, but earthworms will help break the leaf material down, which will make your soil richer for growing plants.
- 6 Take care when turning compost heaps, as small animals may be hibernating inside.
- 7 If your pond freezes over, carefully place a saucerpan of hot water onto the ice to melt an access hole for wildlife.

