



giving  
nature  
a home



# Welcome wildlife into your world

A guide for balconies and other small spaces

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# Making your space special



This guide is especially for people with a small amount of outdoor space, such as a balcony or courtyard. Read on and discover some simple things you can do that are great for wildlife and great for you.

More than 40% of wildlife monitored in the UK has declined over the past 50 years. By welcoming wildlife into your space you can give it a boost, and let it do the same for you in return. What better way to brighten your day than with the sound of birdsong or by enjoying flowers in bloom!



Remember there may be restrictions as to what you can put on your balcony or small outdoor space. Please check what limitations there are and tailor our suggestions accordingly. These restrictions may include managing risks relating to fire safety, as well as ensuring balconies remain safe places for children.







# Growing plants in small spaces

Plants are what will really make your space fit for wildlife. Whatever the size of your space, there is always something you can grow to attract wildlife and provide yourself with a colourful display.

## Good for wildlife

Plants provide food and shelter for all sorts of wildlife. Flowers attract bees and butterflies in spring and summer, while later in the year, seeds and fruits from plants may draw in birds.

## Good for you

Flowers and other plants bring colour and fragrance to the smallest of spaces and can offer welcome shade in hot summer months. Tending to your plants can be a relaxing and enjoyable experience .

## Grow plants in tubs, pots and planters

Generally, the bigger the container, the easier it is to grow the plants and to keep them happy and healthy. Lots of containers and vessels can be recycled into planters so be creative.

## Perfect plants for small spaces

Here are our top five wildlife-friendly plant suggestions for creating a small space for nature in pots and containers:

- **Herbs** such as marjoram, thyme and sage. They're brilliant for bees, and the kitchen.
- **Trailing nasturtium** – easy to grow from seed, you can train it over the side of a balcony to give a display full of colour.
- **Crocus** – plant these bulbs in the autumn or a welcome burst of colour in spring.
- **Patio fruit tree** – you'll be rewarded with blossom in the spring, fruit in the summer and food and shelter for wildlife!



- Single flowered **dahlia** such as Bishop of Llandaff or Happy Flame. Dahlias produce wonderful large flowers that wildlife can see from afar and they go on flowering from July to the first frosts.

See pages 16-19 for a full guide to wildlife-friendly plants that can be grown in containers.



Trailing nasturtium



## Top tips

- Containers can dry out quickly so be ready to water daily in the growing season.
- Balconies can be very shady or very sunny, or both! So, choose plants that will cope with your conditions. Many online plant shops let you search by sun or shade, and garden centres are happy to advise.
- Use containers of different shapes and sizes and group your plants together. This helps the plants retain humidity, plus it can make for a stunning display!
- Use peat-free compost in your planters. Peat is taken from wildlife-rich wetlands and its removal destroys precious habitats and releases carbon.
- Use a general plant fertiliser to keep your potted plants healthy.





- As well as plants and flowers, you can grow small trees or shrubs in large pots. Maximise the space and impact by planting smaller plants or bulbs underneath.
- Plants that like to climb or grow against walls, such as honeysuckle or sweet peas, are also great for small spaces. Train them against a wall or up and over a balcony railing.
- Adding plant pots to a balcony will add additional weight, so check if there are any weight limitations or restrictions.



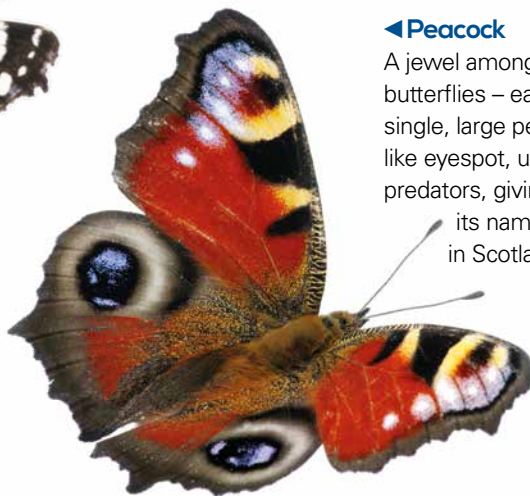
► Use climbing plants like common honeysuckle and sweet pea (top).

# Butterflies to look out for



## ▲ Red admiral

These large butterflies have blackish wings, each with an orange-red band, and can be found throughout the UK from spring through to autumn.



## ◀ Peacock

A jewel among the UK's butterflies – each wing has a single, large peacock-feather-like eyespot, used to scare predators, giving the butterfly its name. Rarer in Scotland.



## ▲ Small tortoiseshell

This is a stunning orange and black butterfly with detailed patterning that is well worth a close look. Look out for them on the wing from spring to autumn.



## ◀ Holly blue

These dainty blue butterflies are more common in the south and the Midlands. Look out for them April to June and again August to September.

## ▶ Large white

These big white butterflies are found throughout the UK from spring to autumn. It and its smaller cousin, the small white, are sometimes called "cabbage whites".





# Add some natural homes

Enhance your outdoor space by adding logs, stones or cobbles in, on or around tubs and planters.

## Good for wildlife

Logs, stones and cobbles can be used by insects as somewhere to warm themselves, and as a place to shelter and hunt for food.

## Good for you

Decorative features can add interest to your view so be sure to unleash your creativity!

## Top tips

- Make sure that all features are securely placed so they don't pose a risk to you, your neighbours or children.
- Logs and branches can be left whole or cut to suit and creatively placed in, on or around your space.
- Add branches. They will make ideal perches for insects or birds.
- Be sure not to remove logs and branches from hedges and woodlands. Ask around or buy branches and logs from a tree surgeon.
- Don't take stones directly from nature. Pebbles and cobbles can be easily purchased from garden centres and DIY stores.
- No maintenance is required beyond occasionally adding fresh logs, branches and other materials.





# Feed the birds

A great way to welcome wildlife into your space is by providing food for birds and you may be rewarded with close-up views and regular visits.

## Good for wildlife

Feeding birds can help populations that may otherwise struggle, and even a window feeder can work wonders.

## Good for you

It is wonderfully distracting to be able to appreciate your birds' colours and fascinating behaviour; you'll find you even get to know some personally!

◀ **Sunflower hearts are popular with many birds**

## Top tips

- Put up a hanging feeder containing sunflower hearts. These are very popular with finches, tits and sparrows.
- Use a "guardian feeder" with an outer mesh cage if you want to deter larger visitors such as pigeons.
- Regularly clean your feeders and the area around them to help keep the birds healthy.
- Feed all year – just vary the amount of food you put out according to demand.

# Birds to look out for

## ► Blue tit

Delightfully coloured, and one of the most likely birds to visit. Watching their acrobatic antics on a feeder is a joy, and they will often make use of nest boxes.



## ▼ Robin

Instantly recognisable with their orange breasts. These are one of our few birds who sing throughout the year – a real treat in the winter months.



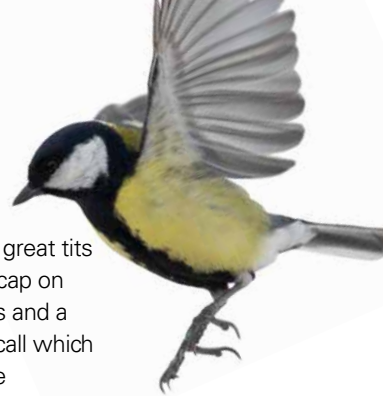
## ► House sparrow

These plucky little birds are often found living near us humans. Chatty and gregarious, they are a pleasure to observe and listen to but sadly their numbers have fallen.



## ► Great tit

Larger than blue tits, great tits have a tell-tale black cap on the top of their heads and a distinctive two-tone call which some say sounds like “teach-er, teach-er”.



## ► Blackbird

Known for their rich, fluty song, male blackbirds are unmistakable with their black feathers and bright yellow beaks. Females have brown feathers.







# Provide a bird bath

Give the birds a place to bathe and drink with this easy-to-make bird bath. A great way to help wildlife and invite nature into your life.

## Good for wildlife

Providing just a small area of water can really help birds out, especially in summer and winter when clean, fresh water may be scarce.

## Good for you

Watching the birds splash about can be fantastic entertainment!

## Top tips

- Almost any shallow container that holds water will work - a large plant drip saucer is ideal, with a maximum depth of around 10cm.
- Avoid anything with steep sides.
- If the inside of the container is slippery, add some gravel to give the birds some grip.
- Fill it with water (tap water is fine).
- You could purchase a bird bath from a garden centre or the RSPB Shop ([shopping.rspb.org.uk](https://shopping.rspb.org.uk)).
- Change the water in your bird bath regularly to keep it clean for your feathered visitors.
- Take time out to enjoy getting to know the different birds that visit.

◀ Bird baths provide somewhere to drink and bathe

# Add a nest box or bee home

You can provide homes for wildlife in even the smallest of spaces by putting up a nest box for birds or adding a bee home. The higher up a building you live, the fewer wildlife visitors you may encounter. However, don't let this stop you - brighten your space with flowers and foliage and be sure to celebrate every visitor!

## Good for wildlife

In some urban areas, there may be limited places for birds to nest, so a nest box could be a great help for some birds. Some unusual small types of bees can set up home in special nesting boxes full of holes and tubes - they are quite harmless.

## Good for you

You are helping wildlife produce the next generation, right on your doorstep. You could be rewarded with a daily drama as good as any soap opera as your new neighbours raise their young right under your nose.

## Top tips

- A variety of nest boxes and bee homes are available to buy. See RSPB online shop ([shopping.rspb.org.uk](https://shopping.rspb.org.uk)). You could choose a woodcrete box rather than wood if fire safety regulations are a constraint.



- To make your own, check out:
  - How to make a bee B&B [rspb.org.uk/buildabeebandb](https://rspb.org.uk/buildabeebandb)
  - How to make a nest box [rspb.org.uk/build-a-birdbox](https://rspb.org.uk/build-a-birdbox)
- Different nest box designs attract different birds. For tits or sparrows, choose a box with a 32mm diameter entrance hole, 15cm from the bottom of the box. Nest boxes for starlings have a 45mm hole, while open-fronted boxes can provide homes for pied wagtails and robins.
- Avoid nest boxes with a perch as this can be used by predators to reach the eggs or chicks.
- Secure the nest box about 2m from the ground, facing between north and east to avoid the box getting too hot or wet. Place the box in a quiet spot that cats cannot reach.
- Every autumn (September onwards) dispose of any contents and rinse the box with a dilute solution of disinfectant in warm water.
- Bee homes are best placed in a warm sunny place and located about waist height from the ground near bee-friendly plants.



# Make a mini-pond

Water can bring a magical and relaxing quality to your outdoor space, and even a mini-pond will help wildlife.

## Good for wildlife

A mini-pond can attract a fascinating array of wildlife, from tiny water beetles to amazing pond skaters, plus birds. Birds too may visit to drink or bathe.

## Good for you

A water feature provides so much interest in a small space. As well as watching for wildlife in and around your mini-pond, you could even try pond-dipping. A great way to entertain children!







## Top tips

- Large tubs and containers can make excellent mini-ponds.
- First place a layer of gravel at the bottom. Don't use soil or compost because it will encourage algae to grow.
- Make sure that wildlife can get in and out by placing large pebbles, bricks and small logs to create stepping-stones.
- If possible, use rainwater to fill your pond. Tap water has chemicals in it.
- Add submerged water plants and others around the edge, poking clear of the surface to give perches and cover to wildlife. Turn to page 19 for our top pond plant suggestions.
- Choose native species. Many pond plants on sale are invasive non-native species that can cause significant problems for wildlife.
- Use special mesh planters and aquatic soil to keep your plants in good condition. Reputable suppliers sell starter kits of plants, planters and special pond soil.
- You may at first see algae or a layer of green weed form in your mini-pond, but over time it will disappear.
- As the pond matures, the plants and creatures should help keep it clean.
- Remember, a mini-pond can pose a hazard for small children, so make sure you place it somewhere safe.



► **Marsh marigolds**  
bring colour to  
your pond.

# Guide to wildlife-friendly plants

Here are some of the best wildlife-friendly plants to grow in containers on your balcony or in other small spaces. All can be found online or in garden centres.

## Plants you can easily grow from seed

To get your green fingers warmed up, why not have a go at growing these flowers from seed!

1. **California poppy** *Eschscholzia californica*. Stunning orange blooms will draw in colourful hoverflies and bring you a bright splash of colour.
2. **Sunflower** *Helianthus annuus*. A cheery sight in any space, leave the flowers into autumn and birds may feed on the dry seeds.
3. **Rudbeckia** *Rudbeckia fulgida*. These yellow flowers will brighten your space and provide food for bees and butterflies.

◀ Sunflower

▶ Cosmos

4. **Cosmos** *Cosmos* species. Tall daisy-like flowers in a variety of colours that look fabulous and are popular with bees.
5. **Cornfield annuals** – packs of mixed seeds, usually including cornflower, corncockle, corn chamomile, corn marigold and field poppy, will bring colour to your space and could draw in bees and other pollinators.



## Herbs

Grow something that's good for wildlife but equally good for your kitchen too.

1. **Thyme** *Thymus* species. In summer these low-growing plants will be covered in delicate flowers, attractive for pollinating insects.
2. **Sage** *Salvia officinalis*. Sage has aromatic leaves that can be used in cooking, and the flowers provide food for insects.
3. **Borage** *Borago officinalis*. Popular with bees, borage produces pretty star-shaped flowers that can be used in cooking.
4. **Chives** *Allium schoenoprasum*. The small pompom-like clusters of

flowers are popular with bees and other insects.

5. **Rosemary** *Rosmarinus officinalis*. Loved by bumblebees and honeybees. This tall herb will be adorned with blue/purple flowers in spring and summer.

## Bulbs

Bulbs are easy to grow. Plant bulbs in autumn and choose a range of species to have flowers from early spring to summer.

1. **Crocus** *Crocus* species. These small bulbs will flower in early spring, bringing some early colour to your containers (see page 5).
2. **Grape hyacinth** *Muscari*

species. These little towers of blue flowers are a good source of nectar in spring and have a lovely sweet fragrance too!

3. **Siberian squill** *Scilla siberica*. This little bulb is best grown in clumps where its delicate blue flowers provide bees with nectar in early spring.
4. **Allium** (ornamental onion) *Allium* species. Bright blooms on long tall stems, they are great for bees and look fantastic.
5. **Sicilian honey-garlic** *Nectaroscordum siculum*. This bulb has wonderful dangling flowers on long stems. They look fantastic and are easy to care for.

## Flowers that keep going



▲ Rosemary

▼ Allium





## year after year

Grow these in outdoor containers for successive years of colour and scent.

1. **Lavender** *Lavandula* species. A wonderful fragrant plant that's popular with pollinating insects.
2. **Wallflower "Bowles' Mauve"** *Erysimum linifolium* "Bowles' Mauve". Evergreen plant with pretty lilac flowers from summer to autumn. Popular with butterflies.
3. **Heather** *Calluna vulgaris* or *Erica* varieties. A magnet for bees that visit the delicate flowers. Heathers will look good in summer and winter.
4. **Penstemon** *Penstemon* species. Lovely bell-shaped

flowers provide bees and other insects with food late into the summer.

5. **Single flowered dahlias** *Dahlia* species. Varieties such as Bishop of Llandaff or Happy Flame will produce wonderful large flowers that wildlife can see from afar and they go on flowering from July to the first frosts.

## Climbing plants

Make the most of a small

space by growing up!

These plants can be trained to climb up and over structures like a trellis or a tripod of bamboo canes.

1. **Common honeysuckle** *Lonicera periclymenum*. These sweet-smelling flowers are great for bees and moths, while in autumn the berries provide food for birds.
2. **Austrian clematis** *Clematis alpina*. Suitable for growing in pots and attractive to bumblebees.
3. **Climbing roses**. *Rosa* species. Choose a deep container for a beautiful climbing rose. The flowers and the rosehips are great

for wildlife.

4. **Sweet peas** *Lathyrus odoratus*. Wonderful scent and pretty flowers. Sweetpeas only last one year, so sow or buy new plants each year.
5. **Nasturtium** *Tropaeolum majus*. With vibrant leaves and bright flowers, nasturtiums are a perfect addition to a balcony. Trail them over the railings or up some bamboo canes. Like sweet peas they will only last a year, but they are very easy to grow from seed – simply sow the seeds in some compost in a planter, water and wait for the seedlings to appear.



◀ Lavendar

## Small trees and shrubs

Make a splash with some

statement plants.

1. **Patio fruit tree.** Select a patio fruit tree such as apple, cherry or apricot. Grow it in a large pot – you'll welcome in spring with your own blossom and then enjoy fruit later in the year.
2. **Daphne** *Daphne* species. Choose a variety with scented blooms that will attract pollinators.
3. **Hebe** *Hebe* species. Hebes produce a mass of scented flowers that are great for pollinators.
4. **Caryopteris** *Caryopteris x clandonensis*. Bees and butterflies are fans of this compact plant, which will bring colour to your space in autumn.

## 5. Shrubby germander

*Teucrium fruticans*. This blue-grey shrub has pretty blue flowers that provide food for pollinators.

## Pond plants

Add shelter and colour to your mini-pond! Always buy UK native varieties from a reputable seller rather than taking from another pond. This is to avoid the risk of introducing invasive non-



native plants which can have a devastating impact on nature.

## 1. Rigid hornwort

*Ceratophyllum demersum*. This submerged pondweed provides home for all sorts of life.

## 2. Whorled water-milfoil

*Myriophyllum verticillatum*. Another submerged plant that adds oxygen to the pond for underwater wildlife.

## 3. Water forget-me-not

*Myosotis scorpioides*. Pretty blue flowers that will look lovely around the edge of the pond and provide nectar for insects.

## 4. Lesser spearwort

*Ranunculus flammula*. These



bright yellow flowers will bring colour to the pond edges.

5. **Marsh marigold** *Caltha palustris*. Large yellow buttercup-like flowers that provide a splash of colour.

◀ Hebe

# More information

There is plenty more advice and guidance on our website, including guides for creating nest boxes, bee homes and bird baths.

For more information about gardening for wildlife:

[rspb.org.uk/gardening-for-wildlife](https://rspb.org.uk/gardening-for-wildlife)

For advice on creating wildlife-friendly balconies:

[rspb.org.uk/wildlife-friendly-balconies](https://rspb.org.uk/wildlife-friendly-balconies)

## Save nature while you shop

Buying from our online shop raises valuable funds to help nature, with 100% of our profits going to conservation. We have lots to help you look after wildlife, from bird food and feeders to nest boxes and homes for bees. [shopping.rspb.org.uk](https://shopping.rspb.org.uk)

## Share your wildlife stories

We'd love to hear how you get on. Share your photos and stories on social media. For more information about the RSPB and how to join, please visit [rspb.org.uk](https://rspb.org.uk)



# Working together for nature and people

This leaflet has been made possible by support from

**Barratt Developments PLC**

RSPB and Barratt Developments PLC are working together to develop resources that support communities to help nature thrive in their gardens and balconies. Read about our wider partnership and commitments to nature-friendly housing at:

[rspb.org.uk/barratt-developments](https://rspb.org.uk/barratt-developments)

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