

Creature Comforts

houses to help attract minibeasts to your wildlife garden

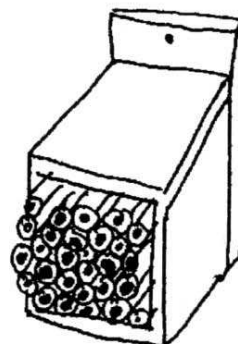


There are 10 million insects in the world and they all need somewhere to live. Intensive agriculture and countryside development has reduced their food supply and destroyed nest sites. Without insects many creatures would starve (bats eat 3000 bugs every night!) Why not help these creatures survive by creating the sheltered conditions they need?

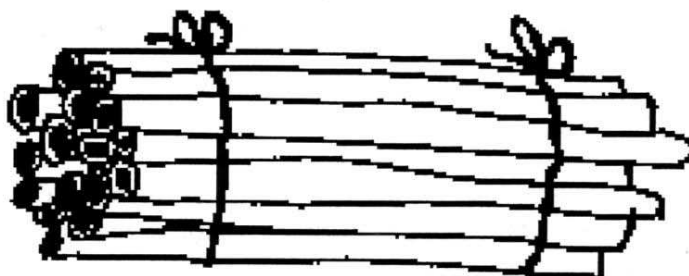
Bug homes

Some insects choose to rest in snug-fitting places. In the wild this means nestling in dead plant stems, tucked in bark crevices, or around houses, in gaps round door and window frames.

- Collect some dry and tough hollow plant stems in the autumn. Species like hogweed, fennel, angelica, bamboo or old elder twigs are good.
- Cut into 20-30cm lengths, and tie into bundles.
- Fix them firmly to branches, fences or walls near where insects live.



Tip: If you use plants with different sized holes you will attract different insects in each one.

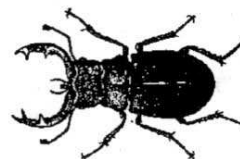


- Alternatively, encourage solitary bees by painting or rust-proofing an old tin can, filling the bottom with a waterproof glue and pack tightly with paper straws cut 1cm shorter

Minibeast motels

Provide shelter and protection for minibeasts by creating one of these habitats;

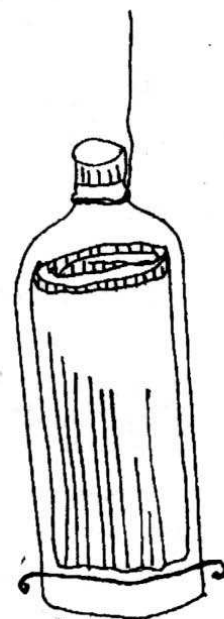
- Untreated wood or log piles rotting in a shady spot.
- Bundles of twigs stacked in quiet corners or build into a stick wigwam.
- A cairn built out of stones or pieces of broken clay flower pot to mimic the spaces in a dry stone wall.



Lacewing hotels

The green lacewing is the only king of lacewing in the UK to spend winter as an adult. It's a great garden bug to have around as it loves munching on aphids. You can help it survive the winter by making accommodation like this;

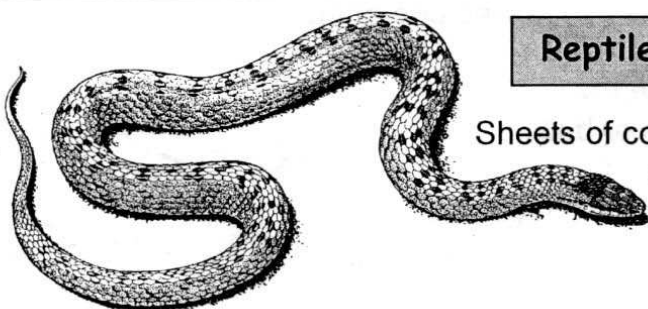
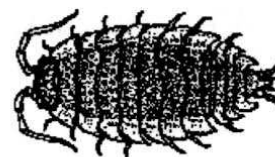
- Cut the base off a large plastic bottle using scissors.
- Roll up about 100cm of corrugated cardboard so it fits loosely inside the bottle and doesn't poke out.
- Push a piece of wire through the bottle sides and across the bottom to stop the cardboard falling out, and bend the ends around.
- Use a piece of strong string tied around the neck of the bottle to hang the hotel up in a tree, in a shrub or hedge, or against a fence in a climbing plant, especially near outside lights or lit windows.



Put the lacewing hotel in place from early August onwards when lacewings start thinking about where to stay. Some people take the shelters into sheds from November to February to protect them from the frost.

Bubblewrap blankets

- Cut two pieces of big-bubblewrap at least 30cm x 30cm.
- Sandwich together with the bubbles facing inwards using a few small pieces of double-sided sticky tape.
- Cover the bubblewrap completely with a third layer (not stuck down) made of thick black polythene.
- Wrap the triple-decker duvet round the base of a tree trunk and tie firmly with string at the top and bottom.
- Leave all winter.
- Check who is living under and in the bubblewrap blanket by loosening the top string and peeling back the black polythene.



Reptile retreats

Sheets of corrugated iron, which heat up in the sun, are ideal shelters for heat loving reptiles such as slow worms, lizards and snakes.