

Special features to look after in your Charnwood Forest garden



Your garden might be bordered by a traditional **dry stone wall** or may even include a **natural rock outcrop**. Both are vital habitats for lichens, mosses and small plants that withstand the tough conditions of the exposed rocks; some of them are rare specialities of the Charnwood area. If you are lucky they could attract Common Lizards or the Wall butterfly which have become rare in Charnwood Forest. Cleaning of walls is not necessary and would destroy its value for wildlife. When you have to repair or rebuild a wall, use the traditional method without mortar or cement.



Traditionally, the pastures and meadows of Charnwood Forest support a characteristic species-rich **acid grassland** flora. Modern farming methods increased the productivity of the fields but wildflowers and other wildlife found in them have been lost. Your **lawn** does not need to be productive and uniformly green. If you don't apply fertilisers and pesticides and cut less frequently, with time you could have a colourful carpet of old meadow flowers such as bird's-foot trefoil, self-heal or yarrow.



Encourage plants that grow in the wild locally. **Rowan** or **Foxglove** are perfectly adapted to the acid soils of Charnwood Forest and will thrive in your garden without much gardening effort. Both are important nectar sources and Rowan provides berries for all kinds of birds. Never dig up plants in the wild. Buy seeds and plants of local provenance or wait for them to arrive naturally.



Slow-worms are legless lizards and totally harmless to humans. They are helpful to the gardener and feed on slugs, snails, beetles and woodlice. In regions of intensive arable farming they are now scarce, but in Leicestershire their stronghold is Charnwood Forest. Gardens can be important habitats for slow-worms if they contain some untidy corners with long rough grass and plenty of cover such as log piles or heaps of leaves. Be careful when disturbing your compost heap in winter, as they are often used by slow-worms for hibernation.

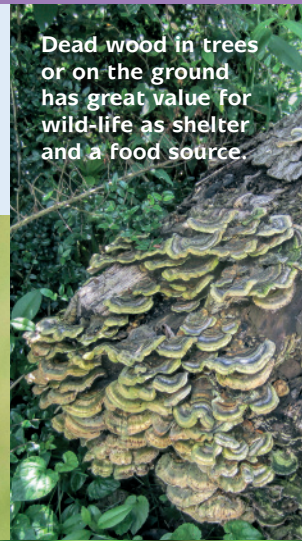


Ivy is a very undervalued plant. It will readily cover walls and trees with its evergreen leaves and provides shelter for many invertebrates which themselves are a food source for so many birds all year round. If thick enough, bats might roost under ivy, birds such as blackbird or wren build their nests hidden under its leaves and butterflies hibernate in it. Ivy flowers in autumn and on sunny days its strong sweet scent attracts a myriad of insects. In spring its berries are a welcome food for hungry birds when not much other food is around. And **ivy does not kill trees!**

Simple wildlife gardening tips

Gardening for wildlife is all about providing food and water, safe shelter and a pesticide-free environment. Your garden can still be ornamental, but don't be too tidy and leave some areas undisturbed.

Dead wood in trees or on the ground has great value for wild-life as shelter and a food source.



Weeds such as thistle, bramble and ragwort are important food and nectar plants for many butterflies and bees.

If you want to do one thing to attract a variety of wildlife to your garden, then dig a pond. No garden is too small to have one, it can even be in a container on a patio. Make sure it has some shallow edges so wildlife can get in and out easily.



Native plants are pretty and great for wildlife. But don't worry if you like traditional garden plants; many are good as well and can provide flowers throughout the year. Be careful though not to grow any **invasive plants**. In Charnwood Forest in particular, two plant species are a threat to our native flora. The **non-native Spanish Bluebell** has escaped gardens and is interbreeding with the native Bluebell, which dilutes the unique characteristics of our British Bluebell. **Rhododendron** is another garden escape which forms dense thickets where little else can survive. Its removal from woodland is a necessary and expensive conservation task in Charnwood Forest.



Your garden - a vital part of a healthy Living Landscape

Traditionally, we see the countryside as a place for wildlife. But more and more animals struggle to find food, shelter and places to breed in the modern intensively farmed countryside. Where birds, butterflies and bees once found food in species-rich wildflower meadows or weedy stubble fields, today there is often uniform green grass or bare fields, leaving no space for wildlife. In consequence, even once common species such as sparrows or hedgehogs have become a rare sight.

If we care for wildlife, it is our responsibility to help wildlife to survive. Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust manages some of our best wild places as nature reserves to ensure they provide habitats and refuges for wildlife. Charnwood Forest has a particularly high concentration of good sites for wildlife but they are isolated from one another. Therefore, the Trust has set up the **Charnwood Forest Living Landscape** scheme to work towards connecting those sites so wildlife can move between them. And your garden can be part of it!

This leaflet will give you some ideas on **how to turn your garden into your own wildlife reserve**.

Our vision is for a Charnwood Forest that has a healthy environment, rich in geology, wildlife and wild places. There will be opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the beautiful and exceptional landscape, set in a working environment. It will be a place where wildlife can move freely and not be confined to a few special sites, and natural processes are allowed to function — in other words a living landscape.

Further reading

This leaflet can only give a few ideas about what you can do for wildlife in your Charnwood Forest garden. But there is a wealth of books, leaflets and websites that will get you inspired. Here are some recommendations:

<http://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk/> - A website run by The Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Horticultural Society packed full of information about gardens and wildlife.

Wildlife Gardening for Everyone: Your questions answered by the RHS and The Wildlife Trusts, 2010 - A compendium of wildlife gardening information combining expertise from wildlife and horticultural experts.

Wildlife of a Garden: A Thirty-year Study - Jennifer Owen, 2010 - A 30 years study of the wildlife in a standard family garden in suburban Leicester.

No Nettles Required: The Reassuring Truth about Wildlife Gardening - Ken Thompson, 2007 - A refreshing approach that debunks some myths about wildlife gardening based on a study of Sheffield University.

We would like to hear from you

Send us a picture of your Charnwood Forest wildlife garden and tell us about it. The best entries will be shown in our membership magazine Wildlife News and on our website.



Leicestershire & Rutland
Wildlife Trust



Photo credits: Charnwood Forest garden, hoverfly, foxglove, painted lady butterfly, dead wood and common blue damselfly (Kate Nightingale), ivy (Steve Woodward). Other photos (LRWT).

Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust is working to protect and enhance the wildlife and wild places of Leicestershire and Rutland and to engage people with their local environment. Our vision is for a Living Landscape rich in wildlife, valued and enjoyed by all.

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Charnwood Forest Living Landscape



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Wildlife Gardening in Charnwood Forest

Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future