



Your Guide to
Taking Action
for Insects



#ActionForInsects

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What is causing insect declines?



Loss and fragmentation of habitat



Routine and unnecessary use of pesticides



Climate change

Action needed to reverse declines



The government must set **ambitious pesticide reduction targets**



Stop routine and unnecessary use of **harmful chemicals** in our communities and daily lives



Government, communities and individuals working together to create a **Nature Recovery Network**

Taking action for insects



Our insects are amazing! Some are beautiful, others fascinating – but all are important, as they pollinate our food crops, provide food for much of our loved and cherished wildlife and dispose of our waste! Yet, 41% face extinction. It's not too late to bring them back, but urgent action is needed.

Action for Insects

Action for Insects is a campaign led by the Wildlife Trusts, supported by a range of partners who are all determined to reverse the alarming declines in insects and help nature recover across the UK.

The Wildlife Trusts hope to inspire and help people take action for insects where they live, learn, work and farm. We want policy makers to know that people care, and want to see changes to protect our threatened insects.

We can all help by reducing our use of harmful chemicals and by calling on the Government to set an ambitious pesticide reduction target. We also need to start establishing a Nature Recovery Network by creating insect-friendly habitats in our gardens, towns, cities and countryside that are bigger, better protected and more joined up.

How can you help to achieve this?

This guide contains lots of useful information to help you turn your home and garden into insect-friendly havens and to help you become an insect champion.

You don't have to do it all or all at once! Just committing to one small action today will help make a huge difference.

Please ask your family and friends to pledge to take action too, and do share what you are doing on **Facebook, Twitter and Instagram using #ActionForInsects**. We'd love to hear about the steps you're taking for insects!

Looking after insects in the garden



How to attract – and keep – insects in the garden

Insects are essential to life on earth, including life in our garden. As pollinators, predators, prey and parasites they keep our garden healthy.

Pollinators All insects help with pollination, but some – such as bees and hoverflies – are particularly good at transferring the pollen from flower to flower. This helps fruiting plants, and with setting seed.

Predators Ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies are natural predators of other garden insects such as aphids, mites, and mealy bugs. Their larvae are particularly voracious feeders.

Prey Insects provide a source of food for many of our much-loved garden visitors including robins and hedgehogs.

Parasites Parasitic insects, such as the tiny tachnid flies and some species of wasps, lay their eggs directly into the host insect; the developing larvae feed within it, finally emerging, leaving the host for dead.



Photo: Chris Gomersall / 2020VISION



Photo: Ed Marshall



Photo: Jon Hawkins
Surrey Hills Photography

To help insects thrive throughout the year you need to create spaces where they can live, feed and breed and which help them to move around more easily. Different stages of the insect life cycle often need different habitats. Our friends at Garden Organic have provided the following advice to help you take action in your own growing space.

Think of your garden as a whole entity, not separate compartments. Picture it across the seasons and think about how all the insect-friendly places you create connect together.

Value dead or dying plant material

Logs, old plant stems, and dried grass are all safe havens for insects to hibernate over winter or take cover in poor weather. Don't tidy them all away! Stems and seed heads provide important homes for overwintering insects, so don't cut back or prune unnecessarily.

Keep some grass long

A short-mown lawn doesn't provide shelter or much food for insects. Allowing your lawns to flower in mid summer also provides important food.

Create a water source

From dragonflies to water boatmen, ponds are important sources of water and nourishment for insects. They don't need to be large. Even a small, shallow pebble pond, or upcycled washing up bowl, will be beneficial.

Allow 'insect safe' spaces

Cracks in walls, rockery piles and corners of sheds will all provide safe spaces for insects to hide from predators, to breed, and to live during poor weather. You can build a 'bug hotel' with a bundle of hollow sticks and bricks or simply create a log pile.



Choose plants that provide food for insects

Prioritise nectar-rich flowers and choose native locally sourced and grown trees and plants where you can. Nectar rich flowers with a variety of simple structures are best. Avoid double flowered cultivars – these often have less or no pollen and nectar – and throw some herbs and grasses into the mix too! Plan your planting so there is something in flower, leaf or fruit throughout the year, and to include night-scented plants like honeysuckle.

Eat and be eaten: encourage a variety of insects

Butterflies and bumblebees are firm favourites for their good looks, but many other insects play a crucial role in keeping your garden healthy. Ladybird larvae will munch on aphids - so don't get rid of their greenfly lunch. Parasitic wasps will kill enormous numbers of other garden insects, from brassica-munching caterpillars to sawflies, ants and aphids. Ground beetles love slugs and snails.

Build insect recovery networks

Think about how wildlife and insects move around your garden. By creating networks of habitats, wildlife is more likely to find a home for all their lifecycle stages. Plant in groups and provide insect-friendly shelters around the garden. Keep hard landscaping like decking and paving to a minimum. Talk with your neighbours and link up your habitats by leaving gaps under fences and allowing trees and hedges to cross over your boundaries.

Go peat free

Sadly, more than 94% of the UK's lowland peat bogs have been destroyed or damaged, and a wealth of wildlife has disappeared along with them.

This vital habitat cannot just be replaced as it takes thousands of years to form. Before you buy compost, always ensure it's peat-free – this applies to potted plants too. There are many peat-free composts to choose from, including grow bags. Other options include bark chippings, coconut shells, and wood fibre as a mulch, or composting waste from your own home and garden.

You can find links to factsheets providing more information on all these points in the 'Further advice' section.

Photo: Paul Harris



Link everything up, but use soft and blended boundaries as nooks and homes for insects and leave wild corners and edges wherever you can.

Night Time “Dark Zone”

Solar & wildlife
lighting only

Vary the height of plants and structure of flowers in your border. Avoid ‘double flowered’ cultivars that have little or no nectar.

Choose native species and locally sourced plants, trees and seed wherever possible.

Insect friendly flowers and
climbers for scent and colour

Compost
bin

Native
shrubs
and
trees

Flowering
grass
and
wildflowers

Lawn
or
turf

Gravel
garden
with
seating

Vegetable, herb and/or salad
patch or raised beds

Leave gaps in the path if you can – cracks for insects to hide in and flowers to grow through... Try to leave space for insects in any patio or decking feature

Rockery or planted stone wall

Herbs or
ornamental
grasses

Log pile
or bug hotel

Bog Garden

Shallow or pebble
pond

Ivy cover on fence or wall

Make sure any fences let insects and wildlife move under or through them with one or two hedgehog-sized holes!

Ivy is a great source of nectar and provides shelter for insects and birds.

You can find a Wildlife Trust factsheet to help create all the features in this garden. Go to www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions



Hero plants for insects

Planting for insects will make your garden beautiful, colourful and full of scent. Choose flowers and shrubs that insects can feed and survive on throughout the year. Even plants in pots on a balcony will provide welcome and necessary nectar or pollen.

Top plants for insects in spring

These flowers will provide a vital source of pollen and nectar for over-wintering insects emerging from hibernation:

Wallflowers, dandelion, pulmonaria, hawthorn and crab apple are great sources of early nectar and pollen.



Photo: Ross Hoddinott / 2020VISION



Photo: Chris Gomersall / 2020VISION

Top plants for insects in summer

Insects need a variety of pollen and nectar sources during this busy time. Different species also prefer different types of flowers:

The carrot family (yarrow, fennel, cow parsley), are loved by hoverflies and lacewings.

Lavender, marjoram, phacelia provide nectar for deep-feeding honeybees.

Buddleia, scabious and mint flowers suit the long feeding proboscises of butterflies.



Photo: Paul Hobson

Top plants for insects in autumn

Many flowers will have already set seed, but insects continue to search out food before the first frost. Choose late bloomers to help!

Michaelmas daisies, heather, dahlia and ivy are some of the best plants for late supply of pollen and nectar and provide great shelter.



Photo: Ross Hoddinott / 2020VISION



Photo: Phillip Brecey

Flowers that release their scent in the evening are a big draw for moths.

Know where your seeds come from

Organic certified seeds will have been produced without chemical pesticides or fertilisers.

Purchase seeds from organisations working to increase biodiversity and encourage seed saving.

Top tips for balconies, doorsteps and small spaces...

- Grow a variety of plants with different flowering times
- Ensure plants don't catch the wind – which can damage and scorch them
- Place your pots in maximum light for best flowering. If you don't get sunshine, choose shade loving varieties
- Even a tiny tray of water with a couple of potted wetland plants can make a balcony bog.

Go here for more tips on hero plants and learn how insects can keep your garden healthy.
www.wildlifetrusts.org/features/garden-insects

Visit Garden Organic here for further helpful gardening advice.
www.gardenorganic.org.uk



Photo: Abi Paine

Top plants for insects in pots and balconies

Why not let your herb pots go to flower – they'll feed you and the bees!

Top plants for evening scent

Insects fly until last light. Scented flowers will attract them in as the day wanes.

Borage, lavender, rosemary



Photo: Penny Dixie

Honeysuckle, jasmine, sweet rocket



Photo: Yvonne Huijbens



Photo: Jenna Lee



Gardening without chemicals



Pesticides and other harmful chemicals are designed to kill a wide range of organisms including insects and plants. Weed killers and insecticides are freely available to buy but they harm insects and destroy the habitat they rely upon. Growing without harmful chemicals takes a bit more thought and planning, but by harnessing nature's natural defences a happy balance between predator and prey can be found.



Photo: Tom Marshall

Try and learn as much as possible about the sort of pests which are attracted to your plants and natural ways of controlling them. These include physical interventions like picking off slugs and aphids by hand, putting up barriers like crushed eggshells to prevent unwelcome intruders, and encouraging natural predators. Garden Organic has a wealth of information on pesticide-free alternatives and Pesticide Action Network UK have a guide to gardening without pesticides (see the 'Further advice' section).



TOP TIPS

- **Plant the right thing in the right place.** A plant grown in the wrong conditions will be stressed and more likely to succumb to unwelcome garden insects or disease. Choose plants suited to the site and the soil.
- **Keep your soil healthy and well fed** with peat-free compost, green manure and/or natural fertilisers. Good soil is full of worms and other life that make the nutrients available to support healthy

Choose to buy locally sourced and grown trees and plants: many plants are imported from abroad. This can increase the risk of importing non-native insects and diseases, and often means they're not suited to local growing conditions.

plants. Wildflowers, however, thrive in nutrient-poor soils, so make sure you leave a patch of unfertilised soil.

- **Mix your planting.** Growing flowers amongst your veg or locating a weed patch nearby will attract beneficial insects, such as hoverflies, lacewings and ladybirds. These will act as predators on sap-sucking aphids.
- **Create barriers.** A barrier of coarse bark or sharp gravel around veg or flower beds helps deter slugs and snails. If you have raised beds, try running some copper wire around the sides to form a ring.
- **Be vigilant!** To keep out slugs and snails, keep checking your barriers, traps and covers, especially after rain or in damp conditions.
- **Don't panic** if you see aphids and blackfly, leave them. Ladybirds, lacewings and birds need them to feed on.
- **Share your growing space with wildlife.** Create food and shelter for hedgehogs, frogs, birds and other small mammals. They will feed on slugs and snails.
- **Finally – relax!** Leave some areas untended or unmown and you will provide shelter for insects and save yourself some work!



Photo: Penny Dixie



Be insect-friendly in other ways...

Pesticides and other harmful chemicals are everywhere! Avoiding them can seem like an overwhelming task, but you can help insects in all sorts of ways in your home and daily life. Small changes can have a big impact. Here are some simple things we can all do to make a difference.

THINK when you shop

- **Local, seasonal and chemical-free**

Choose to shop for local food that is in season; consider switching to organic for some of the items you use the most, if possible; and have a look at the handy Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) **'Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen'** list that can help you to work out which produce to prioritise.

- **Embrace ugly fruit and vegetables!**

They taste the same. Many pesticides are used solely for cosmetic reasons, so buy wonky fruit and vegetables and show your supermarket that they don't need to use pesticides to make it look perfect.

- **Look for Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance labelled products**

Both help to reduce or eliminate some of the most hazardous chemicals and encourage food producers to shift to safer pest management.

- **Choose shops and businesses that care**

and are taking action to minimise pesticide-related harms caused by their supply chains. For those that shop in supermarkets, PAN UK has ranked the top ten on their efforts to tackle pesticides – see where yours ranked here.

www.pan-uk.org/supermarkets



Photo: Paul Harris / 2020VISION





Photo: Romeo Scheidegger



Photo: Michael Tavriov

Only allow water down the drain!

- **Dispose of chemicals safely.** Despite the efforts of water companies, the chemicals we put down the drain find their way into our ground water, rivers and streams. Some add nutrients, sending it off balance and some are toxic to the plants and animals that live in water.

The chemicals that make detergents bubbly in your washing up bowl are called surfactants. These take away the surface tension of water, meaning insects like pond-skaters fall in and can't survive. When disposing of any chemicals or liquid waste like insecticides, weedkillers, paint or cooking/car oil, don't pour them down the drain or put in general refuse! Contact your local authority and find out how to dispose of them safely. For most chemicals, the best ways to keep our water clean is to avoid using them when at all possible!

- **Choose green products and methods for cleaning your home.** Avoiding harmful chemicals when cleaning your home does not mean you have to spend hours doing extra scrubbing. There are plenty of environmentally-friendly products on the market to choose from. Just look on the back of the bottle and see if they are biodegradable and how their chemicals affect wildlife and the environment. Or use kitchen staples – vinegar and baking soda.

There is a wealth of information about greener cleaning on the internet. Have a look! Simply switching one washing-up liquid or cleaning spray for another can make a huge difference for wildlife in our waterways and oceans and protect insects downstream from us.

More advice here: www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/watch-what-you-wash-away 'Watch what you wash away'

SHINE (THE RIGHT) LIGHT

- **How you use lighting in your home and gardens can have a BIG impact on insects and on our wildlife.** Nocturnal insects, including many moths, can become disoriented by artificial light and light pollution is thought to be partly to blame for the decline of glow-worms. Evidence suggests that all forms of artificial lighting (including LEDs and halogen) can impact wildlife and though moths and other night-flying insects may gather around lights, they don't eat or mate while they are there and may circle the light until they drop. They would rather be kept in the dark.
- **Only use outdoor lighting when you need it and leave dark spaces in your garden** – particularly along hedges and in areas away from the house.
- **Use motion sensors or timers for essential or security lighting** and turn off lights when not needed.
- **Position lights as low as possible** – hoods can direct light downwards.
- **Choose low intensity lighting in warm white, yellow or amber hues.** Solar lighting is best for gardens – it's cheap and produces a soft glow.



Be an insect champion



By pledging to take Action for Insects you've taken a big step towards becoming an insect champion! Continue to take small actions for wildlife – all those actions will make a big impact. Share the word with friends and family!

Talk to your MP – tell them that you support more action to reduce pesticide use and to create more and better habitats for wildlife. Ask them what they are going to do about it.

Talk to your local council – encourage them to keep parish, town and city green spaces pesticide-free; to adopt wildlife friendly schemes for street lighting (such as 'switch-off' schemes); to plant wildflowers and let our road verges hum!

Talk to your local garden centre – ask them what they are doing to promote chemical and peat-free gardening.

Get your family and friends involved, by taking the pledge and downloading their own guide at www.wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects

Support the work of Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) – sign up on their [website](http://www.pan-uk.org) to receive news and ways to support PAN UK. (www.pan-uk.org/sign-up)

Share what you are doing on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

#ActionForInsects – we want to build momentum and let policy makers know that we care about insect declines. Help us to raise awareness.

Get involved with your local Wildlife Trust – volunteer or become a member to support our work for nature's recovery. Find out more at www.wildlifetrusts.org/get-involved.



Photo: Penny Dixie

Further advice



The Wildlife Trusts have a wealth of information to help you to make your life insect-friendly, and to improve your local area for wildlife.

See wildlifetrusts.org/actions for a range of factsheets, including a guide to all year round insect-friendly plants; making log features and bug hotels; planning wildlife friendly shrub gardens; gravel gardens and water features. We also have a range of 'spotter sheets' to help you discover the insects on your doorstep.

Find your local Wildlife Trust and discover the work that they do in your area:
www.wildlifetrusts.org/find-wildlife-trust.

Garden Organic (formerly the HDRA) is the national charity for organic growing and provide a fantastic range of resources. For further information on growing and gardening without pesticides go to:

Videos:
www.youtube.com/gardenorganic

Web advice:
www.gardenorganic.org.uk/growing-advice

Podcasts:
www.audioboom.com/channels/4987940

Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) have a range of resources to help individuals, communities, businesses and local authorities take action to stop the unnecessary use of pesticides. They also have a great guide to gardening without pesticides.
www.pan-uk.org/gardening-without-pesticides

Buglife has worked with experts across the country to highlight a set of B-Lines. These wildlife corridors are designed to enable insects to move through our countryside and encourage communities and organisations to create insect-friendly habitats. The B-Lines act as a transport network for insects. To find out if there is an initiative in your area that you can support, go to www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines

Butterfly Conservation runs a range of monitoring schemes the National Moth Recording Scheme and UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. Go to www.butterfly-conservation.org

Climate Action: A number of organisations provide advice around helping wildlife in order to tackle climate change. [52 Climate Actions](#) is a good example, with a list of community actions you can take.
www.52climateactions.com



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about the natural world and saving, protecting and standing up for wildlife and wild places near you. Supported by more than 850,000 members, we take action for insects on our 2,300 nature reserves, through our work with landowners, farmers and policy makers, and by encouraging everybody to look after insects in their area.



The Wildlife Trusts

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 @WildlifeTrusts

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 thewildlifetrusts

#ActionForInsects **#WilderFuture**

With thanks to the following organisations for their support on this campaign.



PAN UK – the only UK charity focused on tackling the problems caused by pesticides and promoting safe and sustainable alternatives in agriculture, urban areas, homes and gardens.

Garden Organic – the UK's leading organic gardening charity, helping people to grow in the most sustainable way.

Buglife – the only organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates.