

HELPING HEDGEHOGS IN THE GARDEN

DID YOU KNOW?
If your dog has fleas – don't blame the hedgehogs in your garden. Hedgehog fleas can only survive by living on hedgehogs!

If you've got a garden, hedgehogs are useful visitors. They will eat slugs, beetles, caterpillars and a variety of other insects.

To attract hedgehogs to your garden you can try providing a natural shelter using log, leaf and compost piles (always check before moving the pile or having a bonfire) or allow patches of bramble to grow up, creating 'wild' areas. You could also place a piece of board against a pile of bricks to form a type of bivouac or buy a purpose built hedgehog house*.

Hedgehogs can travel around a mile every night so, to provide access to enclosed gardens, try cutting holes in fences, removing bricks from walls, or digging tunnels under the garden boundary. This will allow local hogs to move freely in and out of your garden.

Food and fresh water laid out between February and October will encourage visiting hedgehogs to return regularly. You could try leaving out food such as minced meat, fresh liver, tinned dog food (not fish-based), or even scrambled eggs. Remember to check and replace the food and water daily and dispose of food if not eaten.

Hedgehogs like milk but it may give them diarrhoea. So it's best to give hedgehogs plain, fresh water each night in a shallow bowl. They should never be given cows' milk.



Hedgehog friendly gardening...

GARDEN PONDS can be death traps to small animals – make sure there is always an easy route for hedgehogs to climb out of the water. Steps built out of house brick or wire mesh are often used in ponds. Alternatively, make sure the pond has a gentle slope on at least one side. Ideally, swimming pools should have shallow steps and a tight-fitting insulating cover should be used overnight. Remember to check your pond or pool every day!

STRIMMERS should be used sparingly under hedges and in other areas of undergrowth and always make sure you check any areas you want to cut or trim before starting – hedgehogs and other animals are likely to be resting there during the day.

DRAINS and similar open holes frequently trap unwary hedgehogs and they can starve if they are not rescued. Keep all drain covers in good condition and cover any open holes.

LITTER is a real hazard – hedgehogs frequently get their heads stuck in tins, plastic bags, binders from drinks cans or discarded yoghurt pots – make sure you dispose of your rubbish safely. Bin bags left on the ground will also attract hedgehogs, they might try to nest in them and get put out with the rubbish!

NETS particularly those used for tennis, football or cricket, must be furred well above the ground when not in use – hedgehogs often get entangled and die of starvation. Fruit nets are a similar source of danger but can be kept taut to stop animals getting entangled. Make sure all barbed wire is also kept off the ground.

*Hedgehog food mix and hedgehog houses are both available from CJ WildBird Foods – visit www.birdfood.co.uk.



DID YOU KNOW?
As many as ten different hedgehogs may visit a garden over several nights, which could mean that 'your hedgehog' may in fact be a number of different individuals visiting at different times.

Joe Murphy, Derek Middleton/RSPCA Photolibrary

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SLUG PELLETS and pesticides can poison hedgehogs and should only be used as a last resort. Try using other methods such as beer traps, or sprinkling fine sand, ground up shells or coffee grounds around the plants you need to protect; rings made of cut down plastic drinks bottles can offer protection to individual plants and aluminium sulphate-based products can be used over wider areas.

If all else fails and you have to use pellets, place them under a slate which is inaccessible to hedgehogs.

Wood preservers can also be a poisonous to hedgehogs so try using a water-based environmentally friendly treatment.



Hedgehogs hibernate

Hedgehogs hibernate between November and mid-March but they can sometimes be seen out and about in winter, when the weather has been mild. Try to keep aside a hedgehog-friendly area of garden, leaving welcome heaps of leaves and brushwood. If you have to light a bonfire, always make sure there are no animals sheltering in the pile.

Paul Hobson/RSPCA Photolibrary

The hedgehog's spiky coat makes it one of the most easily recognised wild animals in Britain. A hedgehog has about 5,000 spines which can grow up to 2.5cm long and when it rolls up most predators are kept at bay.

DID YOU KNOW?



Caring for autumn orphans

Hedgehogs born late in the season will not have sufficient fat reserves to survive hibernation. Young orphans found weighing less than 500 gms (1.1 lb) at the end of the autumn will need to put on weight to see them through the winter or – if left – they will probably die. Try leaving food out for them in your garden; even if they are over 500 gms this will help them a lot.

If you find an orphan who weighs less than 300g (10.6 oz) they will need specialist care – please call the RSPCA's 24hr cruelty line on 0300 1234 999.

For any orphans found weighing between 300 and 500 gms between mid October and late February, please visit www.rspca.org.uk/younghedgehogs where you can download our factsheet: *Caring for autumn juvenile hedgehogs* for detailed instruction on what to do.

Further reading

- *The New Hedgehog Book* – Pat Morris (Whittet Books, 2006).
- *The Hedgehog* – Pat Morris (The Mammal Society, 2011).
- *The Complete Hedgehog* – Les Stocker (Chatto & Windus, 1987).
- *Hedgehogs* – Nigel Reeves (T & A D Poyser, 1994).
- *The West European Hedgehog* – Lawson, B.L., Bourne, D., and Boardman, S.I., (2002) Wildlife Information Network, London.
- *A Prickly Affair: my life with hedgehogs* – Hugh Warwick (Allen Lane, 2008).

Online resources

- British Hedgehog Preservation Society (www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/).
- Hedgehog Street (www.hedgehogstreet.org).
- The Mammal Society (www.mammal.org.uk/hedgehog).

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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