

through the winter



If you provide birds with food and water in the winter, do it regularly

up. Late-born juveniles and hogs with low body weight are at risk of dying. If you find one awake during the day, please immediately contact Bristol's Hedgehog Rescue's Yvonne Cox, at: hedgehogrescue@yahoo.co.uk

Lots more advice here:
 • britishhedgehogs.org.uk/hibernation/

GARDEN TIDY UPS

The big garden tidy up is the next big peril. Many of us give our garden vegetation a short-back-and-sides makeover as we clear away dead growth - but remember this is home to important insect garden friends, such as overwintering butterfly and moth cocoons, ladybirds, beetles, woodlice and worms.

As well as the valuable compost heap, home to slow-worms and amphibians, why not make an impressive insect mansion out of your garden leftovers? Research has shown that increasing insect biodiversity can boost the health of your whole garden. For inspiration, you'll find some absolute stunners online. Insect hotel builders have turned it into an art form.

• rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature.../build-a-bug-hotel/

POLLINATORS

Be patient and modest about hacking back hedgerows and climbers. Some will still be about to flower or fruit, giving vital food and shelter to bees, birds

and my favourite creepy crawlies. Spare the ivy and holly. They will be coming into flower to offer a rich autumn nectar source to pollinators at a time when garden flowers have largely finished. Honeysuckle and clematis also offer late-season food and shelter to wildlife, especially thrushes, warblers and finches.

BIRDS

Most berries will be nutritious and vital to winter birds. You'll often spot wrens, robins, blackbirds and tits happily scrambling through the tangled bushes. It's a good time to welcome hungry birds with regular bird food hangers. Many are creatures of habit. You will be helping them learn a routine so they know where to come to find food as winter toughens its grip.

PONDLIFE

If you are doing pond maintenance, do it before amphibians settle down in there for winter. Be aware of overhanging autumn leaf fall, which will change the water's nutrient status, reduce water oxygen and result in sludge build up. Also, it's far better ecologically, environmentally and chemically to use water from your rain butt to refill ponds, not tap water.

Remember that some amphibians will be relying on surrounding ground cover near your pond just as much as the water itself, for shelter, food and safety from predators such as

cats. Please avoid tipping aquatic vegetation into drains - some pond species are invasive aliens known to clog up wetland areas. It is illegal to allow them to spread. If things go sub-zero, float a ball on the pond to help curtail it freezing over.

BATS

Although the bat survey season officially ends by October, I often see a few bats out and about into December in Bristol on mild nights. In autumn and winter, they will choose different roost spaces to the summer maternity roosts. They may use tree holes in your garden, gaps in your loft, roof tiles or a shed. Just like hedgehogs, their metabolism slows as they go into torpor, then hibernation, and they become vulnerable if disturbed. Remember if you are planning winter building work that it is illegal to disturb roosting bats. Seek advice on how to proceed in a bat-friendly way, here:

• bats.org.uk/pages/threats_to_bats.html

NEWS

Still time (just) to enter the My Wild Bedminster competition

ALL SUMMER we've been supporting Avon Wildlife Trust and organising visits and support for schools to encourage children to think about wildlife.

We've been asking pupils to explore the ways they could improve the environment around their school for wildlife.

There's been some really interesting work done, with children finding out which plants are best to attract butterflies. Others have looked out for birds and some have studied snails.

The contest was open to schools and individuals until October 30, but as that's the date this issue is distributed, we'll allow a few more days, and name the winners next month.

• www.southbristolvoice.co.uk/wild-photo-winners.html

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