



Towards more sustainable garden design

Gardens are not quite like another room in your house.

These outdoor spaces, connected with nature, impact greatly on the biodiversity of your area, and how environmental resources are used locally and globally.

The exciting thing is that as a custodian of this little bit of outdoor space, you have the power to make decisions which can make a real difference. It is sometimes hard to imagine the cumulative impact of our choices, so here are some areas to think about when deciding on how you would like to re-design your garden in a sustainable way.

Hard surfaces

Hard surfaces (whether paving, decking, gravel...etc) should be minimised. Where possible conservation, recycling or upcycling of existing surfaces should be considered.

The choice of new surfaces can be weighed up in terms of their quarrying, manufacturing and supply environmental impact.

Lawn / grass

Real grass should be maintained minimally, avoiding the use of herbicides and pesticides, and mowed in a way which enables its use (e.g. for play or sitting area) whilst encouraging biodiversity. See more information about the positive impact of reduced mowing at <https://nomowmay.plantlife.org.uk/what-is-no-mow-may/>

And of course, artificial / plastic grass is not an option.

Boundaries

Gardens are very much connected. They can be vital corridors for many species in urban and countryside areas. The repeat or layering of planting across neighbouring gardens, the opening of gaps in boundaries and the reduction of double fencing will allow the free movement of much wildlife. Small gaps in boundaries can be particularly helpful to hedgehogs - <https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/leaflets/A-guide-to-helping-hedgehogs.pdf>

This might be a good time to start of a conversation with your neighbours!

Pots

Don't have too many plant pots. They are high maintenance, and quickly end up not looking good. Hardy plants, in the right soil conditions, will always do much better in the ground.

Water

Water should be conserved and run-off should be minimised through the use of permeable surfaces and sustainable drainage systems.

Where water run off cannot be avoided, consider the creation of a pond or rain garden. Wildlife ponds (however small) have a positive impact on biodiversity.

Water storage should be incorporated if possible.

Soil

The design should work with the existing soil and promote its health.

Planting

Where possible and if appropriate, existing planting should be retained.

New planting should encourage biodiversity, providing food and shelter for a variety of wildlife (different types of pollinators and many other insects) at different times of year.

Native plants bring important benefits to native wildlife, and should be considered as part of the planting, bearing in mind the garden's growing conditions.

An area of the garden (however small) should remain wilder.

Ideally, the supply of new plants should have a low carbon footprint....not always an easy option.

Lighting

Garden lighting should remain minimal, not be automatically switched on at night, and be designed to minimise its impact. Lighting particularly affect negatively insects such as moths, as well as bats and birds.

More information on its impact on wildlife at:

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/campaigns/light-pollution/>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/wildlife/garden-lighting-effects-on-wildlife>

A free guide on how to reduce light pollution from your garden is available from the Butterfly Conservation charity: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/free-light-pollution-guide>

Compost

Have a space for a compost heap. It is a good way to get rid of green waste and will encourage much wildlife to your garden.

Providing additional habitats

Install bird and bat boxes: these can be placed in the garden or against the house.

More information on what nest and roost boxes work best for which species can be found at:

<https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/putting-nest-boxes-birds>

<https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/bat-boxes>

Information about what to do to help many endangered species, such as House Sparrows and Swifts, is available and can be incorporated into your garden or on the exterior of your house.

www.grassrootsgardendesign.co.uk

<https://www.actionforswifts.com/>

There is even a South Manchester Swifts group with advice about what you can do to help this endangered species - <https://southmanchesterswifts.co.uk/how-we-can-help-swifts/>

Create habitats for insects, here too, there are many things you can do. The Buzz Club and Buglife charities provide much inspiration:

<https://www.thebuzzclub.uk/get-involved>

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/get-involved/gardening-for-bugs/>

Maintenance

As part of the design process, maintenance can be discussed in more details. I would encourage you to maintain the garden with no herbicides or pesticides, and minimal energy or water use.

For more information about wildlife gardening, you can also check these blog posts:

<https://grassrootsgardendesign.co.uk/2020/02/11/a-garden-good-for-wildlife-dos-and-donts/>

<https://grassrootsgardendesign.co.uk/2024/06/12/gardening-for-biodiversity/>

I very much look forward to working with you in the re-design of your garden.

Séverine

tel: 07790631078

sev@grassrootsgardendesign.co.uk