



Hedgehogs.. and how to help them

An enthusiastic member of Re-Betchworth enrolled herself on a Surrey Wildlife Trust Zoom Tutorial on Hedgehogs. Full of interesting full of facts and figures that are too numerous to include, so here are the key points. Please also visit www.hedgehogstreet.org as this site offers great advice and you can also log if you have a hedgehog in your garden on a map, which helps to better understand population levels.



Garden Access, Hedgehog Homes, Hedgehog Feeding Stations,

Allow and encourage hedgehogs in to your garden by creating hedgehog highways, access routes and entry points through fencing. Fences are a great deterrent to hedgehog movements - they can travel up to 3 miles in a night. So, please consider creating a 13cm hole in a few points along your fence to allow them to search out food, water and shelter.

If you leave a messy patch in a quiet, undisturbed area of your garden, hedgehogs might make their own nest there either to hibernate in or to rear their young. However, if you want to improve your chances of having a resident hedgehog you could either buy or make them a feeding station and/or a home.

Make sure a **hedgehog home** cannot be accessed by cats, dogs, foxes or large birds such as crows and magpies. A hedgehog house needs a small narrow tunnel at the entrance, leading to a bigger area for sleeping and nursing hoglets. Tim Lyver, our local bird, bug, bee and hedgehog home-builder is happy to supply and/or work to commission;

www.tallgreybird.co.uk

As with hedgehog homes, a **feeding station** also needs to be inaccessible to foxes, cats & dogs or large birds. Re-Betchworth organised a series of 2-3 hour sessions to enable villagers to make their own:



If you do provide a home or a feeding station, place it somewhere quiet and shady in your garden and if you have an area that seems to be full of slugs, put the feeding station there that'll help the hedgehogs – and you – too!

FOOD & WATER

The hedgehog's natural diet mainly consists of ground beetles, caterpillars, worms and slugs. With climate change, hedgehogs can come out of hibernation at a time when creepy-crawlies might be scarce (e.g. cold, dry, frosty periods) and **when they do emerge, they need lots of protein – fast. Hedgehogs will benefit hugely from a shallow dish of water and supplementary feeding at these times. So, start providing food around mid-March**, but don't be surprised if hedgehogs don't turn up immediately, they may still be in hibernation, or simply taking time to find the food.

Hedgehogs are lactose intolerant so please **do not give them milk**. Bread is low in energy so fairly worthless to them. **Hedgehogs will relish any combination of meat-based wet dog or cat foods, or dry cat/kitten food, as these are high in the protein that they need.** Just remember, they will be getting most of their food from insects and worms in the wild, and this food is only supplementary. Place in a shallow dish in your feeding station around sunset. Splitting food over several sites may reduce aggression at food bowls and don't forget to offer water bowls too.

Specially made hedgehog foods both in dry and moist kibble varieties exist and can be bought from most local pet and garden stores. Please note that these specialist foods are not regulated or approved, and those resembling pet food with a high meat content are most suitable. A reliable source for hedgehog food is www.gardenwildlifedirect.co.uk

Should I Clean my Feeding Station?

Hedgehogs are solitary animals generally. By putting food out, you are more likely to attract several hedgehogs. As they share food from the same feeding station, it's possible they could spread disease between each other so to be extra safe, regularly clean your feeding bowls and do not wash them with your own plates and bowls. You might consider moving the feeding station to other suitable areas, but not too far away from where you started as they'll have got used to finding the food there.