

LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

GARDENS & BACKYARDS

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

Summary

Every garden or backyard, large or small, is a potential nature reserve. Biodiversity can thrive when gardens are managed in a wildlife-friendly way. They provide a significant resource for wildlife within Lancashire, as it is here that most people are likely to have direct contact with biodiversity.

Numerous factors may lead to a loss or decline of gardens and backyards. These include infill development, a preference for 'tidy' gardens, an increase in the use of garden chemicals and the introduction of invasive, non-native plants and animals.

Action Plan Aim

To monitor, assess and raise awareness of the value of biodiversity within gardens and backyards in Lancashire.

Habitat Description

This Action Plan covers small gardens and backyards adjacent to dwellings and larger formal gardens. These areas of land may be used as recreational areas for children and adults, and also for the cultivation of fruit and vegetables. Gardens may include areas of regularly mown grass, flowerbeds, ornamental trees and shrubs, fruit trees and bushes and areas where vegetables are grown. They may also contain rough unmanaged areas of grasses and other plants, areas of scrub, a pond or a wetland area. Gardens may also be bordered by hedgerows or stonewalls. Many of these features are valuable wildlife habitats, which may also be found elsewhere in the wider landscape. Every garden or backyard, large or small, is a potential nature reserve, within wider rural or urban areas in which wildlife is increasingly under threat. Gardens and backyards may also act as "wildlife corridors" and "steppingstones" allowing wildlife to migrate between larger areas of suitable habitat.

Many older (pre-1919) urban developments in Lancashire lack gardens altogether, or have only a flagged or subsequently concreted backyard and entry and/or a very small, front garden. Surviving large gardens from this period are usually confined to the immediate surrounds of rural "high status" dwellings.

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Exceptions in urban areas are the larger Victorian and Edwardian villas now in the inner suburbs. However, the original occupants of those would often have employed gardeners. Current economics mean that this is no longer possible and, with little time for gardening available to many present-day occupants and modern requirements for car-parking space, neglect or sterilisation can result. The desirable locations of many “villa” gardens also mean that these are now subjected to pressure for infill housing development.

“Green Field” suburban housing developments built between the 1930s and the 1960s often have substantial gardens, particularly when compared with what went before.

Modern developments tend to favour larger houses, more parking space and smaller, low maintenance gardens. Planning policy guidance promoting denser development seems likely to encourage the trend to smaller private gardens.

Many of the features found within gardens and backyards may also be found in school grounds, sportsfields and amenity grasslands; and in churchyards and cemeteries. There are separate Habitat Action Plans for those.

Ponds and their surrounding vegetation may be found in some gardens. However, these will be dealt with in more detail within the proposed Pondscapes Habitat Action Plan.

There are also separate local Habitat Action Plans for amenity grassland and unimproved neutral and calcareous grasslands, which may also be of relevance to gardens. These areas support flowering plants, mosses and liverworts, lichens, fungi, small mammals, birds, insects, amphibians and reptiles. Ancient lawns can support large numbers of “waxcap” fungi.

This biodiversity can thrive when gardens are managed in a wildlife-friendly way. Many garden flowers, trees and shrubs provide food for butterflies and moths, small mammals and birds; while frogs, toads and newts may breed in garden ponds.

Gardens and backyards form a significant resource for wildlife within a Lancashire context. It is here that most people are likely to have direct contact with biodiversity, and that the individual has most opportunity to look after and encourage wildlife. Many people feed garden birds during winter month while others specifically manage their gardens and backyards with wildlife in mind, by their choice of garden plants and other features; by avoiding the use of garden chemicals and by providing bird or bat boxes. In addition, the owner or tenant of a garden or backyard may have more indirect but nonetheless far-reaching positive effects on biodiversity by recycling their household waste into compost, or by avoiding the use of peat. Compost heaps also provide habitats for small mammals, invertebrates and reptiles.

National Status

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Gardens and backyards cover a significant extent of the land surface of the UK (estimated at over 400,000 hectares). However, most gardens tend to be intensively managed, whilst backyards may consist of largely sterile, hard surfacing. There is the potential for all gardens and backyards to be designed, modified and managed to attract wildlife.

Regional Status

There is no collated regional data.

Local Status

The administrative county of Lancashire is largely rural, but there are significant built-up areas on the Fylde coast and along parts of the M6, M65, M61, M55, and M58 corridors. Collated information on garden and backyard biodiversity throughout Lancashire is not available, although backyards associated with the terrace houses are more prevalent in East Lancashire where historic mill towns occur. The likely size of the area involved would suggest that this habitat makes an important contribution to the overall biodiversity of Lancashire, and that its potential to enhance this general biodiversity is considerable.

Current factors affecting the habitat

The following may cause a loss or decline of the extent of gardens and backyards, and also their quality in terms of habitat for biodiversity:

Infill development within settlement boundaries.

- Hard-surfacing of front gardens for parking off-road.
- Low maintenance gardens (*i.e.* planted mainly with shrubs and/or areas of lawn, and covered by extensive areas of gravel and/or concrete paving): these have lower plant and structural diversity and thus offer fewer opportunities for wildlife.
- A preference for using closeboard fencing for garden boundaries; and, in some instances, the removal of hedgerows and old walls.
- A shift away from growing fruit and vegetables – these can provide food and shelter for wildlife in autumn and early winter.
- The growing of fewer traditional “cottage garden” plant species: these are generally more favourable to local biodiversity than more modern cultivars because they tend to be species that are either native to Lancashire or have been grown in this area for many centuries. They also tend to produce more nectar and scent than “doubles” and other

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“highly bred” cultivars, making them more attractive to nectar-feeding insects.

- A decrease in the number of compost heaps – besides the indirect biodiversity benefits of composting in terms of recycling resources, compost heaps themselves also provide habitats for small mammals, invertebrates and reptiles.
- A preference for “tidy” gardens, with less wood and leaves left to rot – rotting wood and other plant material provides a habitat for many invertebrates and fungi. Alternatively, unmanaged areas of “weeds”, grass and scrub allow small mammals and birds to burrow, nest, and feed undisturbed by predators.
- An increase in the use of garden chemicals including herbicides, insecticides, slug pellets, and rat poison.
- The introduction of invasive, non-native plants and animals - for example New Zealand Stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*). Such introductions will not only have negative effects on garden or allotment biodiversity, but also on the wider landscape should they “escape”. Nineteenth century garden introductions, such as Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam did so with damaging consequences persisting to the present day.
- Creation of water features that offer few opportunities for wildlife.
- Predation of amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals by domestic and feral cats (*Felis catus*).
- A lack of awareness among gardeners of ways of making their gardens more wildlife-friendly.

However, “wildlife gardening” has gained in popularity over the past 10-15 years and now features quite prominently on the agenda of the horticultural “establishment”. The Royal Horticultural Society and “celebrity gardeners” make frequent favourable reference to “garden biodiversity”.

Important Sites

No collated information is available.

Current Action / Mechanisms

- *Policy*

Whilst there is no legal protection for gardens as a whole, one or more of the following may apply in some cases:

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Tree Protection Orders (TPO) – not a nature conservation designation.

(Architectural) Conservation Areas – not a nature conservation designation.

The presence of species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (e.g. Red Squirrel), and the EU “Habitats & Species” Regulations (e.g. bats, Great Crested Newt).

Local authorities may have a policy specifying minimum sizes for gardens in new developments.

- *Site Safeguard*

Private gardens are currently excluded from international, national or local nature conservation designations.

- *Land Management*

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackpool Borough Council and Lancashire County Council have a rolling programme to distribute free compost bins to residents.

Skips for the disposal of domestic garden waste - to be used for composting - are provided at municipal, public amenity, waste recycling & disposal sites.

- *Advisory*

Generic advice on conservation and enhancement of biodiversity within gardens and backyards is available from publications produced by a wide variety of organisations including EN, BTCV and TWT.

Myerscough College runs courses on horticulture that consider organic and biodiversity issues.

- *Research and Monitoring*

BTO Garden Birdwatch and Garden Bird Feeding Survey and RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch operate at national level but have local participants.

- *Public Relations*

BTO Garden Birdwatch and Garden Bird Feeding Survey, and RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch, all operate at UK level; but publicity associated with these initiatives will raise awareness at the local level.

Indicators of Habitat Quality

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- Variety of plant species.
- Complexity of planting structure.
- Extent of total flowering period.
- Presence of nectar sources, edible fruit and seeds.
- Presence of accessible water feature(s).
- Presence of compost heap(s).
- Presence of maintained semi-natural and artificial wildlife shelters, nesting sites and feeding stations.

Habitat Targets

Target	Area	Measure	Timescale
Assess the resource of gardens and backyards	Lancashire	Area assessed	2008
Promote biodiversity action through garden management	Lancashire	Countywide project rolled out	2012

Proposed Actions

Action (priority: H, M, L)	Area	Measure / Milestone	Partners	Timescale
<i>Research and monitoring</i>				
Develop a wildlife survey methodology and training for owners of gardens / allotments and encourage the submission of records to Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership.	Lancashire	Survey developed	TWT	2010
Set up a database for observations from gardens	Lancashire	Database established as part of Local Record Centre	LCC	2010
Implement a "Biodiversity in your garden" survey using a simple questionnaire / return slip, and distribute widely	Lancashire	Survey implemented.	TWT	2010

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Site safeguard and monitoring				
Encourage gardeners to manage their gardens and backyards in a manner appropriate to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, and on sustainable principles	Lancashire	Programme of events identified to highlight importance of gardens for wildlife (i.e. training days/promotional leaflets). At least one event to take place annually.	TWT	2009
Habitat protection and management				
Encourage the use of water butts to save water and raise awareness of the impact of excessive water use.	Lancashire	Leaflet/poster produced aimed at garden owners highlighting benefits of water butt use.	LCC, BDBC, BBC	2009
Encourage the use of peat free compost and alternatives to water-worn limestone	Lancashire	Leaflet/poster produced aimed at garden owners identifying wildlife friendly garden materials	TWT	2009
Advisory				
Encourage garden centres and gardening societies to promote wildlife gardening and the use of sustainably produced products.	Lancashire	50% garden centres provided with information and resources promoting wildlife gardening	TWT	2010
Promote existing sources of information on wildlife gardening.	Lancashire	Existing sources of information identified and promoted.	TWT	2009
Hold one major event such as a 'wildlife garden makeover' day, training events	Lancashire	One-off awareness day undertaken	TWT	2009

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and Open Garden series showing best practice.				
Publicity				
Promote through WT website information on plants (trees, shrubs and flowering plants appropriate to Lancashire) that provide habitat and food sources for wildlife.	Lancashire	Website promoted	TWT	2009
Continue to promote and offer compost bins to Lancashire residents at a competitive price.	Lancashire	Compost bins readily available to general public.	LA's	Ongoing
Liase with Myerscough College, garden centres, gardening clubs and societies over events and publications in order to raise awareness of potential biodiversity values of gardens, and of management techniques to conserve and enhance biodiversity.	Lancashire	Network of interested parties established with regular contact from each promoting events and publications.	TWT partners &	2012

LINKS WITH OTHER LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLICIES

Garden Habitat Action Plans in adjacent LBAP areas.

ABBREVIATIONS

BC = Butterfly Conservation

BTCV =British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

EN = English Nature (Cheshire to Lancashire Team)

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LCC = Lancashire County Council

LBAP = Local Biodiversity Action Plan

MC = Myerscough College

SSSI = Site of Special Scientific Interest

TPO = Tree Preservation Order

TWT = The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside.

Related Action Plans

Allotments, Built Structures, Bumblebees, Common Frog, House Sparrow, Great Crested Newt, People, Song Thrush

References and additional reading

Academic papers

Beer, A. R. (2003), *Greenstructure and Urban Planning - Case Study - Sheffield*, University of Sheffield.

Thompson, K., Austin, K. C., Smith, R. M., Warren, P. H., Angold, P. G. and Gaston, K. J. (2003) *Urban domestic gardens (I): putting small-scale plant diversity in context*. *Journal of Vegetation Science*, **14**: 71-78.

Books & Leaflets

Baines, C. *How To Make a Wildlife Garden*, Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2000 (ISBN 0 7112 1711 4); original edition, Elm Tree Books/Hamish Hamilton, London, 1985 (ISBN 0 241 11448 9)

Bardsley, L., *The Wildlife Pond Handbook*, New Holland Publishers (UK), London. (ISBN: 1 8433 0111 3)

Beddard, R., *The Garden Bird Year*, New Holland Publishers (UK), London. (ISBN: 1 8597 4655 1).

Briggs, J., *Creating Small Habitats for Wildlife in Your Garden*, Guild of Master Craftsmen, 2001. (ISBN: 1 861 0818 8X)

Hill F., *Wildlife Gardening: a practical handbook*, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Derby, 2000. (ISBN 1 871444 00 4)

Huntington, L. *The Wild Garden*, Cassell's Garden Directories, The Ivy Press, Lewes, 2000. (ISBN 0 304 35486 4)

Lewis, P., *Making Wildflower Meadows*, Frances Lincoln Ltd., London, 2003. (ISBN 0 7112 2133 2)

Living Gardens (Gardening Action for Wildlife), leaflet produced by Dorset Wildlife Trust.

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Moss, S. & Cottridge D., *Attracting Birds To Your Garden*, New Holland Publishers (UK), London, 1998. (ISBN 1 85974 005 7 (pbk)).

Packham, C., *Chris Packham's Back Garden Nature Reserve*, New Holland Publishers (UK), London, 2003. (ISBN 1 85605 846 8)

Rees, Y., *Practical Wildflower Gardening*, Crowood Press, Marlborough, 1994 (ISBN 1 85223 778 3)

Roulac, J., *Backyard Composting*, Green Books, Totnes 1999

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), various free leaflets:

- *Feeding garden birds*
- *Gardening with wildlife*
- *Planting gardens for birds*

The Wildlife Trusts, various free leaflets:

- *Where to buy peat-free products*
- *The Wildlife Trusts' guide to wildlife gardening - top tips for creating a wildlife friendly garden*
- *Water Wise Gardening (Water Policy Team: Fact Sheet 7)*

The Wildlife Trusts, publication:

Waste Not Want Not- Everything you always wanted to know about making garden compost. Limited availability. (Cost: £1).

Wildlife Gardening, Information Sheet No. 2.09, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Edinburgh, October 2001

PC CD-ROM

English Nature, "*Gardening with wildlife in mind*", The Plant Press, Lewes, 2003. (ISBN 1 903257 06 9)

Web Sites

Biodiversity in Urban Gardens Project 2002; *Biodiversity in Urban Gardens in Sheffield*. (Background: *Urban gardens as habitats*). Available online at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/bugs/backgrnd.html>.

Royal Horticultural Society; *Gardens: Heaven or Hell for Wildlife?*, Conference Proceedings, December 2002
<http://www.rhs.org.uk/research/biodiversity/proceedings.asp>

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Royal Horticultural Society & The Wildlife Trusts:

- “*Wild About Gardens*” Web Site: www.wildaboutgardens.org

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds:

- “*A to Z of a Wildlife Garden*” web site:
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/gardens/guide/>

Space for Nature - wildlife gardening forum web site:
<http://www.spacefornature.co.uk/>

Other Garden HAPs

Flintshire Habitat Action Plan: *Gardens* (undated)
North Merseyside Habitat Action Plan (in preparation)
Wrexham Habitat Action Plan: *Gardens* (draft, June 2002.)

Date (30th June 2004)

Draft No. (4)

Author (David Dunlop)

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Broad Objective		A. Assess resource		
	Develop wildlife survey methodology and training for owners of gardens / allotments and encourage the submission of records to Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership. Set up a database for observations from gardens.			
	Implement a "Biodiversity in your garden /allotment" survey using a simple questionnaire / return slip, and distribute widely.			

Broad Objective:		B. To promote biodiversity action through garden management		
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
To encourage gardeners to manage their gardens and backyards in a manner appropriate to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, and on sustainable principles	Encourage the protection of existing garden features of value to wildlife			
	Provide information through website on plants (trees, shrubs and flowering plants, appropriate to Lancashire) that provide habitat and food sources for wildlife.			
	Continue to promote and offer compost bins to Lancashire residents at a competitive price.	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC	O	P, PR, LM

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	Encourage the use of water butts to save water and raise awareness of the impact of excessive water use.	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC	O	P, PR, LM
	Encourage the use of peat-free compost and alternatives to water-worn limestone.	TWT, BwDBC , BIBC , LCC	O	P, PR

Broad Objective: C. To involve people (businesses; schools, higher and further education institutions; county, unitary, district and parish councils; public and private landowners and managers) in the delivery of biodiversity in gardens & backyards				
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
To increase awareness of the biodiversity value of gardens and backyards.	Encourage garden centres and gardening societies to promote wildlife gardening and the use of sustainably produced products.			
Liaise with Myerscough College, garden centres, gardening clubs and societies over events and publications in order to raise awareness of the potential biodiversity values of gardens, and of management techniques to conserve and enhance biodiversity.	Promote existing sources of information on wildlife gardening. Hold one major event such as a 'wildlife garden makeover' day, training events and Open Garden series showing best practice			

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Encourage appropriate planting schemes in new housing developments	Develop a series of small local events with local interest groups Develop 1 event per year aimed at planners and developers to raise awareness of importance of landscaping to biodiversity			
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