



26th January 2026

British Garden Centres guide on how to love and support British wildlife during the coldest months

As temperatures drop and natural food sources become scarce, the team at the UK's largest family-run garden centre group, British Garden Centres, is calling on gardeners to help wildlife through winter, as native species face tough conditions during the coldest season. With wildlife populations under pressure from habitat loss and climate change, even small gardens can become important winter refuges, and simple changes can make a real difference to survival rates. Here, we show the small steps you can take this winter to make sure your outdoor space is a haven for garden visitors.

Why winter is so hard for wildlife

During winter, three things become scarce for British wildlife: food, water, and shelter. As natural food disappears, water freezes, and traditional habitats decline, gardens play a bigger role in supporting native species.

Garden birds can lose up to 10% of their body weight overnight just staying warm, making regular food supplies vital. Hedgehog numbers have dropped by half over twenty years as they struggle to find insects. Ladybirds, bumblebees, and solitary bees need safe places to shelter until spring arrives, so these next few weeks can be a harsh time for our garden visitors.

Supporting garden birds

While bird feeding is rewarding, being consistent matters especially during the colder months. Once birds find a reliable food source, they depend on it throughout winter. You can support our feathered friends by offering different food types for different species, such as sunflower hearts for robins, finches, and tits, unsalted peanuts for woodpeckers and nuthatches, high-energy suet balls and fat cakes for mealworms for robins and wrens, and niger seeds for goldfinches.

Feeders should be placed at different heights, away from where cats might hide, and cleaned regularly to stop diseases from spreading. Some birds prefer feeding on the ground, blackbirds and thrushes like food scattered on lawns or in ground feeders. Fresh water is equally important for birds need it for drinking and keeping their feathers clean. Check water dishes daily to break ice and top up supplies when needed. You can stop the water from freezing by placing a small ball in the dish or bird bath, as the movement will stop the water from freezing in cold snaps.



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Hedgehogs

With hedgehog numbers falling fast, there are many ways to help this beloved species through winter and help them navigate their way through the cold weeks. Hedgehogs like to roam, so by cutting 10-12cm holes at the bottom of fences to create "hedgehog highways", they can move between gardens searching for food and mates. Put out meat-based cat or dog food, or hedgehog food, at dusk for them to graze on. Always check log piles, compost heaps, and bonfires, as hedgehogs often hibernate in these spots. Hedgehog houses tucked under shrubs or against fences provide safe hibernation sites from predators. You can also leave areas of the garden a bit wild with piles of leaves and logs where hedgehogs can shelter safely through the coldest months.

Insects

It's not just birds and hedgehogs to consider in winter; you also need to think about the smaller creatures that keep gardens healthy. Ladybirds, solitary bees, hoverflies, and lacewings all need safe places to spend the cold and dark days. Hollow plant stems left standing become perfect winter homes, so resist cutting back all perennials until spring, so they provide shelter for these types of wildlife.

Insect hotels mounted on sunny walls provide more accommodation, whilst leaving log piles and areas of undisturbed leaves offer natural shelter in the garden. These insects are the ones that eat aphids and pollinate plants come spring, so protecting them now pays off later in your growing season.

Frogs, toads and other amphibians

For anyone with a pond, make holes in the ice by resting a pan of hot water on the surface. Never smash the ice as this can harm frogs, toads, and newts hibernating in the mud below. Compost heaps generate warmth as they break down, which will attract amphibians, so leave these undisturbed through winter. Piles of logs and stones provide shelter for frogs and toads, so leave these in a corner of your garden to protect them from predators.

Other garden visitors

Animals like foxes and squirrels can also visit gardens and need accessible water sources through winter. Shallow dishes placed around the garden help all wildlife stay hydrated when natural sources freeze. Wood mice, voles, and shrews shelter in dense vegetation, log piles, and compost heaps. Leave areas of the garden deliberately wild to provide homes for these creatures.



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Julian Palphramand, Head of Plants at British Garden Centres, said: “Many people assume wildlife doesn't need our help during winter, but the reality is quite the opposite, as it's when they need us the most. Gardens can provide critical resources when natural habitats are at their most vulnerable, so our tips will help wildlife thrive over the winter months, so they can thrive throughout the year and beyond.

For more information about wildlife gardening products and advice, visit your local British Garden Centres or check the website www.britishgardencentres.com

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Notes to Editors:

About the business:

British Garden Centres (BGC) is the UK's largest family-owned garden centre group with 74 centres around the country. The group is owned and led by the Stubbs family, who also own and operate Woodthorpe Leisure Park in Lincolnshire.

BGC was launched in 1990 with the opening of Woodthorpe Garden Centre by brothers Charles and Robert Stubbs. Since 2018, it has expanded rapidly with the acquisition of 50 garden centres, allowing it to grow from its heartland to the business it is now, with 74 garden centres spread from Carmarthen to Ramsgate, Wimborne to East Durham.

The group has a team of 3200 colleagues working across the garden centres, restaurants, 2 growing nurseries, 4 distribution centres, Woodthorpe Leisure Park, and Woody's Restaurant & Bar.

Social Media

Facebook: British Garden Centres

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Website: www.britishgardencentres.com

Contact

Cassie King - PR Officer

cking@britishgardencentres.com