

Welcoming Nature Home



Wild Gardens Gamlingay & Hatley

Menu of Opportunities



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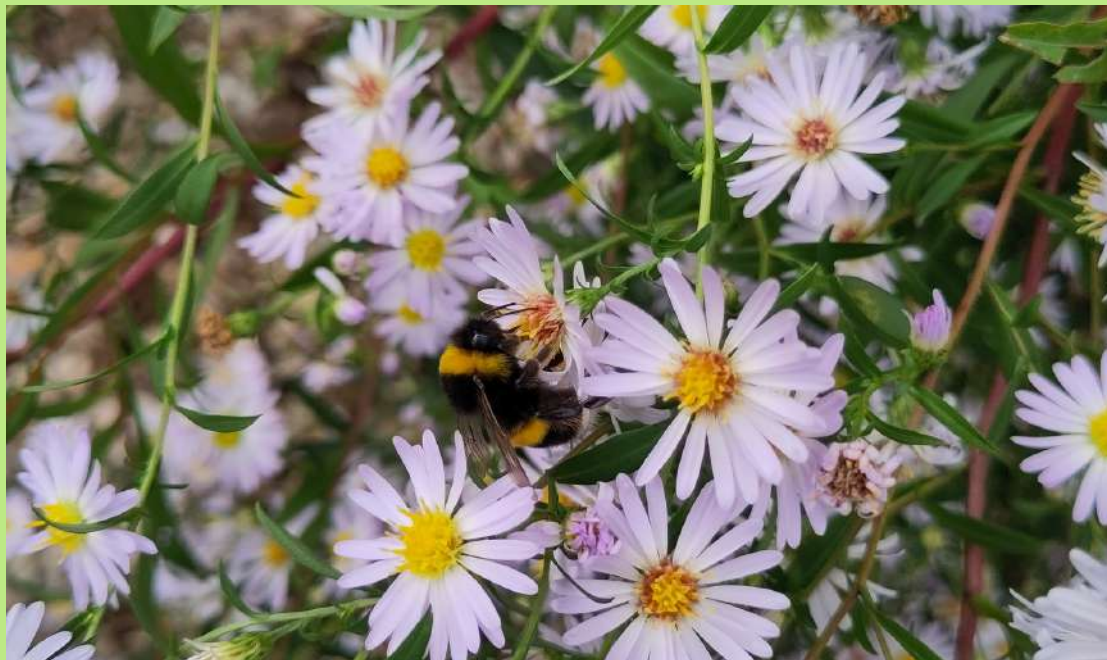


Apply an Incremental Gardening Approach

Pick one change per season to bring into your garden. There is no pressure to do everything at once.

Consider establishing replacements for things you want to change. For instance to stop using pesticides, instead establish plenty of plants and shelter that will attract beneficial insects like hoverflies and ladybirds. To reduce slug pellet use try creating shady corners for toads and hedging plants for birds like blackbirds and thrushes.

Stop the Use of Harmful Chemicals Including Herbicides, Fungicides, Pesticides, Insecticides and Chemical Fertilisers



The use of chemicals in gardening, public land maintenance, pet flea treatment and farming has had a devastating effect on invertebrate populations. Insect numbers are at their lowest ever.

This in turn reduces the populations of animals further along the food web. Notably in Gamlingay this includes hedgehogs, house martins and swifts whose numbers have visibly and rapidly declined in our parish over the last ten years.

In human terms this means less pollinators available and a reduction in fruit and vegetable harvests. Food crops and gardens are more vulnerable to resistant pests without insects that will predate them such as hoverflies and beetles.

Investigate alternatives and put them to use.



Bat Roosts

Bats are an important indicator species for how biodiverse an area is. <https://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/why-bats-matter/bats-as-indicators-of-biodiversity/uk-biodiversity-indicator-species>
Bats help to manage the populations of night flying insects such as mosquitos, midges and moths.

Bats prefer to roost in old, hollow trees but as there is not an abundance of these in Gamlingay we can give these flying mammals a home with bat boxes or by allowing them to sleep under hanging tiles and boarding.

Bats are not rodents and they don't nibble on wood, wires or other parts of buildings. In Britain all bats are protected by law and it is illegal to harm them or disturb their roosting sites in any way.

<https://www.greenwoodsecohabitats.co.uk/bats-boxes>
<https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/roost-replacement-and-enhancement/partnerships>

Bee Bricks

Alongside growing pollinator friendly plants and having at least a small bowl of water in your garden, bee bricks are another easy way to help support our native solitary bees. Solitary bees are non-aggressive and don't sting as they have no queen or honey to protect. Over 90% of UK bees are solitary and they carry out the majority of pollination activity in Britain.



Built in Bird Nests

Are you a house builder or building an extension? Built-in Bird Nests are a simple way to increase habitat for wildlife including sparrows, blue tits and swifts; even ladybirds and butterflies are known to over-winter in them.

<https://nansledan.com/project-news/duchy-nest-box-boost-for-endangered-wild-birds/>



Bird Boxes

“Nest boxes don’t just provide extra habitat, they provide vital replacement habitat for natural nesting sites lost due to the destruction of woodlands and hedgerows, the loss of traditional farm buildings such as barns and changes to the way we maintain our homes.”

<https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/blog/erin-mcdaid/ticking-all-right-boxes>

By increasing the number of bird boxes in Gamlingay we can support and increase our local populations of blue tits, robins and swifts. Very importantly we can come to the aid of birds on the priority list due to their rapidly declining numbers like house sparrows.





Bird Feeders

Due to the reduction of forage plants such as hedgerow trees and meadow grasses, good clean bird feeders can provide an essential life line for birds. This is especially important with fluctuating weather patterns causing late frosts, sudden harsh, cold snaps or extremely dry conditions all contributing to the reduction of plant food and insects and the birds' energy to fly far for forage.

Bug Hotels

Bug hotels of all sizes help to replace lost natural habitats and provide space for invertebrates to shelter, hibernate, forage and nest. These homes for insects can be lovely to look at and have the added bonus of encouraging pollinators and beneficial insect predators to your garden's ecosystem.

<https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/07/Build-a-bug-hotel.pdf>



Community Compost Scheme

A scheme to keep food waste local and build soil biodiversity. Food waste can be collected in homes and then gathered and composted within the parish. Locals can then purchase highly nutritious, microorganism-rich compost at a reduced rate. This is an ideal solution for those with smaller garden spaces or who do not wish to have a compost heap in the garden.

“Diverting local food waste from landfill or incineration is very important to us as well as cycling these nutrients to create a compost full of the microorganisms which give life to the soil. This process reduces the carbon emissions from food waste drastically and boosts biodiversity.”

<https://www.compostclub.online/>





Compost/ Wormeries

If you do have space in your garden and are interested in creating your own growing medium then a compost area or wormery are ideal ways to drastically improve soil biodiversity and in turn the health of your plants.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/how-to-compost>

Community Veg Garden

A fruit and vegetable garden situated in the parish which was accessible to all could grow herbs, fruits and veggies with flowers for pollinators such as beans, peas, squash and tomatoes. This could be a space where local people could come and learn how to garden with wildlife, improve soil health and grow delicious food. Food grown could be shared and knowledge taken away and practised in home gardens.

“Small steps taken in the 520 thousand hectares of gardens in the UK can play a major role in restoring lost wildlife, suggests our new research paper released today.

In our Every Garden Matters study, Bruce Pearce has collated the latest data on biodiversity loss and reviewed the findings of extensive studies. His research shows simple actions in backyards, balconies and allotments - such as planting a wider diversity of native plants, composting, planting a tree, or creating habitats - can have a major impact on the worrying drop in wildlife populations.”

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/news/every-garden-matters>





Dead Wood Piles and Stone Piles-

Deadwood is an essential part of a diverse ecosystem providing essential nutrients for fungi, food for decomposers such as woodlice and shelter for many insects and bats. This in turn provides a food larder for larger insects, birds such as woodpeckers and mammals like shrews. You can make a log or stick pile somewhere in the garden or if you prefer something more structural, have a go at creating a dead hedge.

<https://earthtrust.org.uk/living-dead-hedges/>

Stone or Rock piles can provide valuable cool shelter and warm basking spots on top for newts, lizards, toads, frogs and butterflies.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/deadwood/#:~:text=Wood%20decomposition%20is%20one%20of,insectivorou s%20birds%20and%20other%20animals.>

Farm for Wildlife

Regenerative Farming or Agroecology is one of the most effective ways to produce food sustainably whilst increasing biodiversity.

Practices including recreating field boundaries, small tweaks to field margin management and planting flower and seed rich habitats would greatly benefit the biodiversity of Gamlingay Parish. These practices enhance soil health which not only improves the nutrient quality of food but also reverses species decline and then boosts wildlife populations.

<https://regenerativefoodandfarming.co.uk/more-wildlife/>

<https://farmwildlife.info/>





Forget Fake Grass - try a lawn alternative

Artificial grass holds no benefit for wildlife whatsoever. It dries out and degrades soil life. It reduces water absorption rates increasing surface runoff and flooding issues and absorbs sunlight at a higher rate increasing localised warming. The creation and transportation of artificial grass has a high carbon footprint and once in place it cannot absorb carbon from the atmosphere as grass and other lawn plants can. Artificial grass is made from polyethylene which degrades into microplastics that enter the water systems, soil and then the food chain. It is difficult to reuse and recycle with only a few specialist companies attempting this.

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/discover/why-are-artificial-lawns-bad-for-the-environment>

With such a large area of gardens and grassed areas, Gamlingay Parish is well-placed to create nature rich lawns with mixtures of grasses, wildflowers including clover and self-heal and even beautiful shaded mossy areas which benefit invertebrates and birds. An entire lawn doesn't have to be left to grow, leaving longer border edges, grassy islands or longer areas around trees are very beneficial. Wildlife friendly lawns require a mix of plants so herbicides and pesticides don't need to be applied. Wild flowers thrive better in slightly nutrient depleted soil so compost and fertiliser don't need to be added either. Longer lawns with a mix of grasses and flowers cope better when it's hot and their more extensive root systems absorb more rain; there are a myriad of benefits.

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-to-grow-a-better-lawn-for-wildlife.html>

Fruit and Nut Trees

There are many varieties of fruit and nut trees such as plums, pears, apples and hazelnuts that can be easily grown in private gardens or public spaces. Not only do they provide delicious, sustainable food for communities but also increase habitat and forage for wildlife. With the right advice many back gardens in the parish could benefit from one or two trees. To increase productivity and benefits to biodiversity the trees can be underplanted with bushes and plants suited to the soil type, perhaps blackcurrant, rhubarb or flowering bulbs that attract pollinators.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2021/11/british-trees-to-plant-in-your-garden/>



Hedgehog Doorways

Hedgehogs are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. All of the gardens and public areas in Gamlingay have the potential to support this mostly solitary, nocturnal creature. They are non-territorial and will happily travel 1 to 2 km per night. They like to follow linear features and that is why small hedgehog doorways in fences and walls of about 13cm square are an easy way to increase their foraging space. Even better would be for this to be a stipulation for all newly built houses. They can visit tens of gardens in a night and will help to control populations of slugs, beetles and caterpillars helping to keep biodiversity in balance. Having hedges, untidy corners and leaf piles will give the hedgehog a place to shelter and hibernate.



Hedgerows with Seed-bearing Trees

Gamlingay Parish has many private gardens and public spaces that would benefit from planting a mixed, native tree hedgerow. Hedgerows can be just a couple of metres to miles long, planted with species that suit the soil type and climate. Hedgerows make excellent wind breaks, can shade and cool gardens in very hot spells, reduce pollution and also reduce flooding by slowing water runoff and absorbing rainfall. Hedgerows of course make fantastic habitat as well as forage for humans and wildlife; elderflower cordial, hazelnuts and blackberries to name a few! With the right advice and communication Gamlingay could restore this important landscape feature across the Parish providing a significant boon to wildlife.

(<https://www.habitataid.co.uk/blogs/blog/native-hedge-planting>)





Hibernaculum

A hibernaculum is a safe refuge for insects and amphibians such as toads and reptiles such as common lizards. A hole about the size of a bucket (although can be bigger) is dug and filled with stones and logs. It is then covered with soil or turf.

<https://www.froglife.org/tag/hibernaculum/>

Land/ Green Space Management for Wildlife

Similarly to regenerative farming, public, municipal spaces can be managed in a way that benefits both people and wildlife. Mixed grass and wildflower areas, hedgerows and tree planting all may play a part. Millbridge Brook Meadow is an example of how a public space might be developed and enhanced over time. Other practices such as reducing chemical controls, carefully planning cutting regimes and enhancing soil with locally produced compost will ensure that the public spaces of Gamlingay are increasingly biodiverse which will in turn enhance the public's enjoyment of the spaces.

<https://cpparkspartnership.org.uk/>



Land Purchase for Community Ownership

Introducing a mosaic of habitats across the parish is a priority and finding ways to bring land into community ownership would greatly contribute to this. Pockets of land that can not be developed due to the Neighbourhood plan could be enhanced and significantly increase biodiversity in Gamlingay.

Schemes such as Community Buy Outs, Biodiversity Net Gain Units and Carbon Offset projects should be explored to enable the community to affordably purchase and enhance land for the benefit of the community and ecosystem.

<https://www.makeitwild.co.uk/become-a-land-owner-partner>

<https://communityfarm.land/financing-your-project/>



Landmark Trees



Even a single tree is a vital habitat for wildlife. For instance a Silver Birch can support over 300 species of invertebrates, fungi and birds. With good advice single trees can be planted in front and back gardens, public spaces and school grounds. A single tree can also help to mitigate flooding, slow water run off, provide cooling shade and reduce pollution.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2021/11/british-trees-to-plant-in-your-garden/>



Lights Off

Artificial lights are one of the main causes of insect population decline. By switching off all-night garden lights we can help to boost insect numbers which then has a beneficial impact on birds, bats and plants pollinated by night flying moths and other insects. Swap intense security lights for warmer, motion-detected lights preferably with an amber glow or have solar-powered lights in one area but leave the rest of your property to the night.

Further guidance and information can be found here:
<https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2023/06/Buglife-Nurture-the-Night-Shift-Bug-friendly-Lighting.pdf>
<https://www.buglife.org.uk/campaigns/light-pollution/>

Litter Picking Group

Litter poses many dangers to wildlife either through entrapment or ingestion of plastics. As plastic litter degrades, microplastics are released into the soil and water systems eventually entering the food chain and polluting habitats including rivers, seas, fish and human bodies. Litter picking is a great way to exercise, build community and mitigate harmful environmental impacts; good for the well-being of all.

<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/home>



Mowing for Wildlife

Long grass provides essential habitat and forage for invertebrates, birds and small mammals. Within our Parish and in our gardens we could support the increase of biodiversity by leaving field edges a little longer, creating grass islands, and having carefully managed seasonal mowing plans. It is important to let grasses go to seed, leaving seed heads for forage and for next year's crop as well as stems for over-wintering shelter for insects like ladybirds. Keeping structure in the garden and public spaces over winter provides hibernation, shelter and forage for wildlife.

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-to-grow-a-better-lawn-for-wildlife.html>





Mulch

Use wood chip, compost, cut grass, dead leaves or other mulch around the base of plants and to cover all bare soil. This helps to retain moisture, protect from frost and reduce the need for watering. No need to dig in. Over time mulch also helps to increase the fertility of the soil and feed the very important microbiome.

Native Seed-bearing Trees - Hawthorn, Rowan, Crab Apple, Hazel

Gamlingay gardens, public spaces and field edges are ideal sites to plant native seed-bearing trees. With the correct advice to match the right tree with the right place many more trees could be planted across our parish boosting numbers in our tree depleted county.

Planting more trees in Gamlingay will contribute to slowing water runoff and mitigate flooding, add to a cooling effect as temperatures rise and provide windbreaks and welcome shade.
<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/news/what-do-we-know-about-how-trees-can-cool-our-towns-and-cities/>

There will also be a myriad of benefits for wildlife providing shelter, nesting sites and seed bearing trees providing specific food for birds such as blackbirds, thrushes and waxwings.
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/benefits/>



Native Wildflowers and Plants

Native Wildflowers such as poppy, daisy and yarrow provide extremely important forage for pollinators like bees, hoverflies and butterflies. Birds such as goldfinch and siskins will feed on plants like thistle, cornflowers and teasels.

Planting wild flowers will attract other insects and minibeasts that provide food for birds like wrens and robins as well as bats and other small mammals such as hedgehogs.



Native Wildflower and Tree Nursery - plants for birds, bees, moths, butterflies and people

Creating a community nursery of plants and trees grown from locally carefully-sourced seed could provide the parish and surrounding areas with affordable, appropriate plants for small garden projects and larger farm-scale projects. Plants might include native trees, wildflowers, orchard trees and nut trees.

<https://gmccouncil.com/community/community-nursery/>

<https://huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/1470/huntingdonshre-community-plant-and-tree-nursery-leaflet.pdf>





Peat-free Planting

Peat bogs are precious habitats that not only store more carbon than rainforests but also are home to niche plants and creatures that cannot survive anywhere else.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/peat>

Although we do not have boglands in our parish we can play our part in stopping their destruction by not using any peat based products in our gardens. By using our considerable consumer power we can purchase and utilise other growing mediums that have much less impact on biodiversity. Alternatives include wood fibre or composted bark based compost, green compost made from collected green waste or home-made compost or leafmould.

Permeable Surfaces - Driveways/ Paths

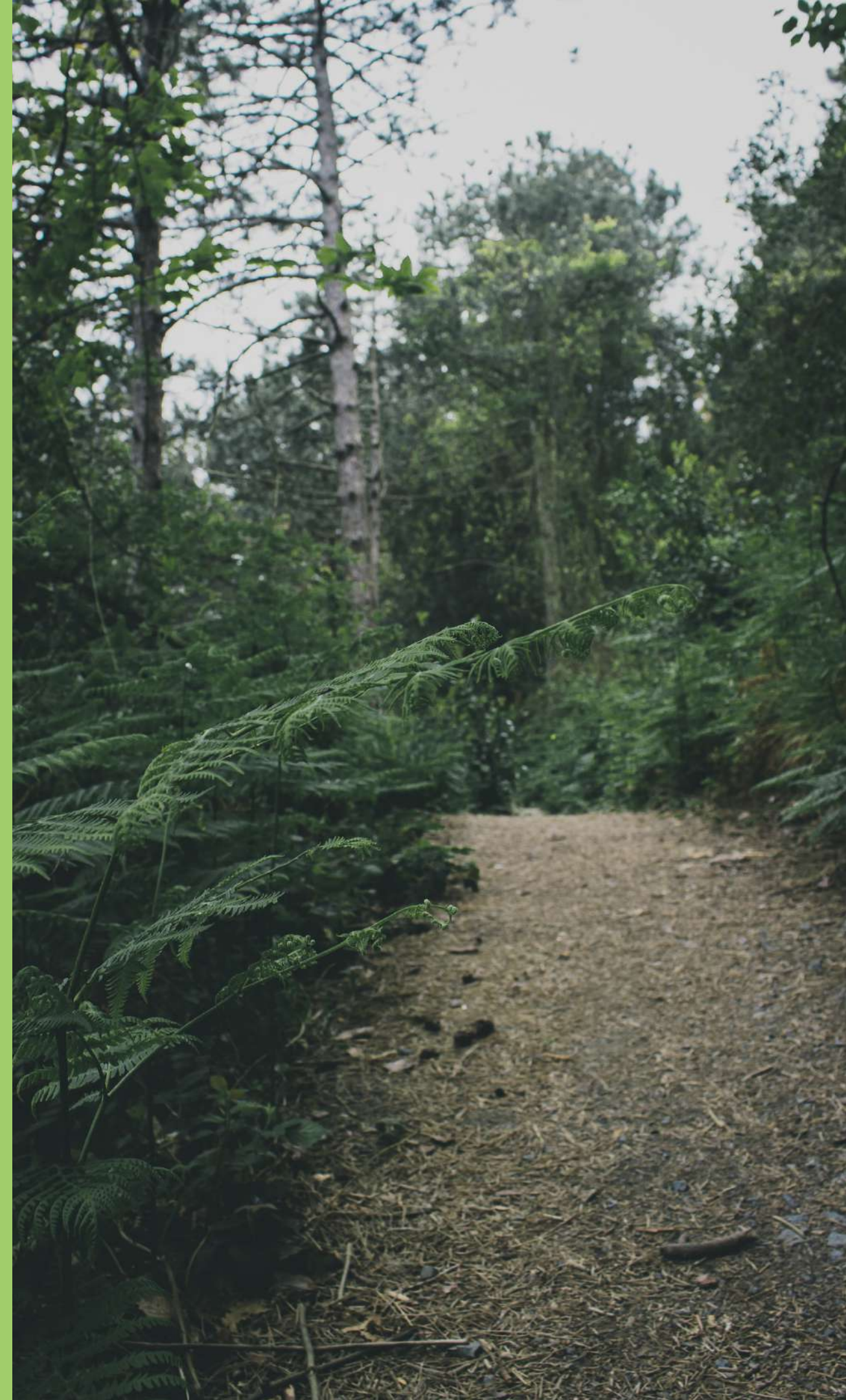
Turning the tide on the fashion to fully pave driveways could help to mitigate localised flooding in the future.

“paved non-permeable surfaces prevent rain from being absorbed into the ground, so instead the rain runs off the surface overwhelming drains, and causing floods.”

<https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/flooding/flood-prevention/driveways-and-flooding/>

As our weather system changes and we expect to get more sudden, heavy downpours it is essential that we prepare our homes for this. Alternatives to paved driveways include gravel or grass reinforced with matrix pavers or grids. It is also possible to pave with permeable pavers and to alleviate water runoff with a purpose built rain garden.

These alternatives also provide the opportunity to introduce native plants and trees to a driveway which are fantastic for biodiversity and also for absorbing more rainfall. The added benefits of hedges, trees and plants in the front garden are privacy, reduction in pollution and noise, and cooling effects in hot weather especially during the night.





Pond Creation

Ponds of any size, whether large, a bucket or a scrape have huge benefits for biodiversity. A pond is a nursery for many invertebrates including dragonflies. Ponds provide welcome water for birds and small mammals such as hedgehogs. Ponds are home to beneficial garden dwellers such as frogs and newts. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-create-mini-pond>

Creating many more garden and field ponds in the parish would add to a more diverse mosaic of habitats and greatly boost biodiversity.

Rain Gardens

Rain gardens absorb and store rainwater which then slowly dissipates into the surrounding soil. This reduces the water heading into drains and plays a part in mitigating flooding. They are hugely beneficial in back gardens but especially in front gardens near hard paved areas.

As an added bonus rain gardens are planted with native species that cope in fluctuating dry and wet conditions including yellow flag iris, meadowsweet and primroses. Whilst a beautiful addition to any space, rain gardens increase biodiversity and provide habitat and forage for invertebrates. Invertebrate numbers are declining at a rapid rate and as a foundational part of the food web the knock on effects unless this is reversed are alarming.

<https://www.wwt.org.uk/discover-wetlands/gardening-for-wetlands/how-to-make-a-rain-garden/>





Save Dead Leaves - Make leaf mould, mulch, leaf piles

Making space for dead leaves in the garden or a corner of a park can greatly benefit many creatures including hedgehogs, toads and frogs. Leaves can be gathered and left on garden beds as leaf mulch which covers the soil, creates nutrients and holds in moisture. Leaf mould can be made to be used as a compost substitute and to add nutrients to the soil.



Vegetable Garden

Making some space in a garden for vegetable growing benefits humans with tasty, nutritious food, gentle physical exercise (especially if you have a no-dig regime) and an activity that boosts mental well-being.

Gardens with veggies and herbs with flowers for pollinators such as beans, peas, squash, thyme, rosemary and tomatoes can boost biodiversity. Birds and ladybirds will enjoy helping you care for plants by controlling aphid numbers. Organic, chemical free gardening will boost the soil microbiome and catch and absorb rain water.

Growing a bit of your own benefits wider wildlife by reducing food transport miles and chemical pest and fertiliser inputs.

Vertical Gardening

Vertical gardening is a great solution for those without much space or for those who want to add another dimension to their garden. Climbing plants such as ivy, hops and honeysuckle provide nectar and shelter for invertebrates; berries, seeds and a nesting site for birds such as robins, wrens and blackbirds. Alternatively add wild flower turf or sedum strips to your shed or bin store roof. With the rapid decline in insects and birds currently occurring, any extra habitat and forage we can provide in gardens will have a positive impact.



Water Butts

Attaching waterbutts to houses, sheds or any building with downpipes has a multitude of benefits. Rain can be collected to water plants on warm days and is superior to tap water, some plants in fact fail to thrive when watered with tap water.

Using rain water means that less mains water needs to be cleansed and pumped saving energy and money. Catching water in a water butt slows the flow to main drains and helps reduce flooding. Having rain water available means ponds can be topped up during hot spells and water made available for birds, bees and other creatures to drink and bathe in.





Water Wisely

To make water go further especially collected rain water, it is good to be mindful of when watering is done. It is better to soak well and less often, this helps to establish long, healthy roots which help plants to thrive in cold snaps and warmer weather.

It is best to direct water to the base of plants where it will soak into the soil and be taken up by the roots; watering leaves can cause leaf burn or on hot days the water evaporates before the plant can use it. Water early in the morning or late in the evening when the sun is not so strong so as much water as possible soaks into the soil and doesn't evaporate away.

Watering in this way will help save precious rain water, help plants thrive and create healthy habitats for wildlife as well as improving the soil microbiome.

Wildlife Volunteer/ Walking/ Spotting/ Learning Group

Most wildlife habitats need some level of maintenance and care to provide the best possible conditions for wildlife to thrive. Caring for many of the areas around the parish is carried out by volunteers. It would be of great benefit to the community and biodiversity if there were more volunteers. Volunteering has many benefits both for physical and mental health. Wildlife volunteering has been shown to increase people's connection to nature and desire to protect and care for it.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-links-volunteering-nature-better-mental-health#:~:text=The%20evidence%20is%20loud%20and,sense%20of%20connection%20to%20nature>.

Within the parish there are opportunities to spend time in nature: walking, spotting wildlife, taking part in surveys or conservation activities. This may be with the Wildlife Trust volunteering in Gamlingay Woods or attending one of their workshops. Friends of Millbridge Meadows would gladly welcome more regular volunteers who can take part in activities such as meadow raking, river restoration or hedge laying. Local churches have a need for scythers and rakers amongst other activities to maintain the churchyard wildlife areas.



Wild Corners

Leave space in your garden for wild plants to colonize, it is fascinating to see the new plants that emerge each year. Plants such as nettle, thistle and dock provide valuable forage for birds and insects. The nettle is the main egg laying spot for peacock, small tortoiseshell and red admiral butterflies. A small bramble patch or tangle of native plants offers protection and shelter for many creatures including sparrows whose declining habitats have them on the UK red list.



Wild Paths

Currently most of our best biodiverse places are on the fringes of the parish and in one concentrated area, such as Gamlingay Woods. In order for biodiversity to increase, wildlife needs to be able to travel and spread. To create this connectivity across the parish we need to create a patchwork of wild islands. This should be a mosaic of habitats that are spread throughout gardens, public spaces and fields. By increasing the number of diverse ecosystems there will be a rise in available forage, shelter and nesting sites that will consequently greatly contribute to raising the numbers and diversity of species in the parish.

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/641597270550118>

