

Hedgehogs, Houses & Hibernation



If you're lucky you may have seen hedgehogs in your garden in the summer when they spend nights feeding, getting ready for hibernation. They eat many creatures (including beetles, caterpillars, slugs, snails and worms) and may travel up to 2 miles each night.

But, since 2000, more than half the hedgehogs have disappeared from rural Britain and they are now "near threatened" on an International Conservation Red List.

Declines in their preferred habitats, and their favoured foods, are likely causes. But humans can cause problems, too.

Hedgehogs need a patchwork landscape, which gardens can provide. They often visit several gardens on one night – and some develop a routine, visiting the same gardens night after night.

But if we create barriers (eg. replacing hedges with fences or leaving drain covers off) we can cause problems.

If your garden is surrounded by a fence or wall, making small openings (about 12cm x 12cm) will let them wander through. Heaps of leaves, log piles or compost heaps encourage the creatures that hedgehogs like to eat and they are also useful day-time hiding places.

Over-enthusiastic gardening can be dangerous for hedgehogs, so please check before strimming, lawn mowing and lighting bonfires, especially for small young ones. Hedgehogs don't tend to run away: they curl into a ball which can often have bad results.

Remember, remember hedgehogs on the 5th of November!

Bonfires are very dangerous for hedgehogs as woodpiles are ideal places for shelter. Sadly many hedgehogs are killed every year in un-checked bonfires. It's best to put bonfires on open ground (not on piles of leaves where hedgehogs may already be hiding), build the bonfire on the same day that you'll light it (to reduce the chances of hedgehogs deciding it's a nice home) and check it thoroughly before lighting.

If you find a hedgehog, move slowly and calmly. Pick it up with gardening gloves, along with any of its nesting material, and place it in a cardboard box lined with newspaper. Put the box in a safe place and release the hedgehog under a bush or log pile.

If you find a hedgehog in full daylight it may be unwell: particularly if immobile or moving "drunkenly". You can call the British Hedgehog Preservation Society for advice on 01584 890 801.

As the weather gets colder hedgehogs look for places to hibernate and man-made homes can help. Make one in good time so that it settles into the surroundings, ready for occupation. It can be made of wood (see <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/build-a-hedgehog-house>) or brick (see: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-to-make-a-hedgehog-house.html>) or bought: <https://www.riversidewoodcraft.co.uk/collections/hedgehog-houses>