



*The RHS and The Wildlife
Trusts – encouraging wild
into your garden*

Wild About Gardens Newsletter January 2017



January's bare gardens reveal the foundations on which they are formed. It's not just the hard landscaping and structures or the skeletal branches of deciduous trees and shrubs. Underneath all of this lies the earth and soil upon which all life in the garden depends.

Look after the soil and it will look after your garden and its wildlife. Soil is full of microorganisms and myriad [small invertebrates](#). Some, like [earthworms](#), play a key part in in garden ecology. They aerate the soil with their tunnels, recycle nutrients by feeding on dead plant leaves, and are themselves food for birds and small mammals.

[Earthworm Watch](#) has been set up to find out more about worms in the UK and their habitats. You can take part in its surveys and help it map worms nationwide. Results so far show that [vegetable beds](#) have the highest density of worms, possibly because of nutrients added to the soil.

There are many other surveys that you can take part in throughout the year. Some are specific to gardens, like the [RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch](#) towards the end of January, or the [British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch](#), or [Butterfly Conservation's Garden Butterfly Survey](#), both of which run year-round. Others welcome records from gardens as well as other habitats.

For more inspiration, see [Wildlife Gardening Forum's list of other surveys](#). It's good to take part, and to feel you are adding to our knowledge of wildlife in the garden and beyond. For a communal birdwatching event, why not join in an early morning walk at RHS Wisley on 28 January ([booking essential](#)).



Things to do

- Think birds! Keep feeders topped up, put out scraps for ground feeding birds, keep the birdbath free of ice. All this will help the birds get through winter in good shape.
- Milder days may bring hedgehogs out of hibernation, so keep an eye out and be ready with some cat food or dog food.
- For a novel way to recycle your Christmas tree, along with other prunings and branches, why not experiment with creating a '[dead hedge](#)' woven around a suitable part of your garden.

More things to do in **January**.



Things to look for



Fox

Winter is a busy time for foxes. Last year's cubs are now juveniles that need to disperse and find their own territories. Adults mate in January and February, which can be very noisy, with screams and barks. As spring nears you may spot vixens on the lookout for a suitable den.



Toad

Toads are still overwintering, but as you start working in the garden there is a risk you may disturb them in their shelters. They favour compost heaps, log piles and leaf mounds, even upturned plant pots. Toads need our help as they have suffered a steep decline in the past 30 years.



Starling

Starling numbers are still swelled by winter visitors, and small flocks may visit your garden. They are gregarious, chatty birds that tend to swoop in for a while before flying off. They rejoin their larger roost at dusk and that is when we see them in their flowing 'murmurations'.

More about what to look out for in **January**.

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