



Factsheet no.1

WINDOW BOXES AND CONTAINERS

Wildlife-friendly gardening techniques can be applied in even the smallest of spaces. Window boxes and containers are ideal resources for creating wildlife habitats.

Selecting a container

Recycled wood is a great resource for making your own window box and an array of used containers make interesting growing pots. Try old sinks, baths, chimneys, buckets, oil cans and even old boots. Bought containers made from wood, stone and terracotta give a natural look. Stoneware is more expensive but gives protection against frost. Try to steer clear of buying plastic which is harmful to the environment and easily degrades in sunlight.

Planting

- Ensure container has adequate drainage holes.
- Line the bottom with broken pot and/or stones to aid drainage
- Fill with a good organic compost, be aware of the weight if you're putting on a roof or windowsill.

Woodland habitat

A variety of trees including oak, ash, beech and hornbeam can be container grown. Trees will need a lot of watering. Moisture retention is helped by large pots with good quality compost. A layer of bark chippings on the soil will reduce surface evaporation and help to suppress weeds.





Woodland wildflowers thrive in a semi-shaded position and flower in early spring. They provide a valuable source of early nectar for bees and butterflies. Natural woodland habitat is damp with rich fibrous soil so add coir compost and bark chippings with water retaining granules. Containers need to be kept moist; watering may be required 3-4 times a day in hot weather.

Bluebell, bugle, daffodil, foxglove, primrose, red campion, snowdrop, violet, wile arum and wood anemone are all suitable for a woodland pot.

Container ponds

Mini ponds and marshes can be created in many types of reusable containers set into the ground. A pond is easily created and is a very useful resource in a wildlife garden. For further information see the ponds factsheet.

Meadow habitat

Meadows thrive with low levels of fertility in the soil, so it is important to use low nutrient compost and a pot with good drainage for a meadow habitat. Removing dead material reduces the build up of nutrients and water retaining granules reduce the need for watering.

A spring meadow should be trimmed in July and a summer meadow in September. Mix in some grasses and allow to flower and set seed to provide food for birds.

Hanging baskets

These are mainly viewed from beneath so plant them with trailing plants. Baskets can be lined with black polythene, or coir matting.

An old sweater or t-shirt could also be used as a liner. Be wary of using moss, some suppliers ruin habitats by collecting moss from the countryside. Fill with lightweight peat-free growing medium.

Food plants

A container or window box within easy reach of the kitchen offers an opportunity to grow a ready supply of herbs.

Bell peppers, tomatoes and chillies also do well in containers.

Flowers planted amongst food plants will attract beneficial insects which are predators for pests. Experiment with annual flowers such as Calendula (marigold) or *Convolvulus tricolour* (dwarf morning glory). You can also use the calendula petals in your salad or to make a herbal tea.

Maintenance

- Containers require a lot of watering especially in hot weather.
- Plants may need renewing regularly, but meadow planting can last a long time if properly trimmed after the flowers have set their seed.



Food plants suitable for container growing

Courgettes, tomatoes, potatoes, aubergines, spring onions, chard, leaf beetroot, French beans, beetroot, cabbage, lettuce and other salad leaves, radishes.

Plants suitable for containers

Spring meadow

Cowslip (*Primula veris*)

Lady's smock

(*Cardamine pratensis*)

Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*)

Bulbs

Crocus (*Crocus vernus*)

Daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*)

Snake's head fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*)

Grape hyacinth (*Muscari neglectum*)

Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*)

Summer meadow

Field scabious (*Knautia arvensis*)

Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*)

Meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*)

Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*)

Oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*)

Winter plants

Cyclamen (*Cyclamen coum*)

Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*)

Garden pansy (*Viola wittrockiana*)

Hepatica (*Hepatica nobilis*)

Iris (*Iris reticulata*)

Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*)

White aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*)



Kitchen herbs

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

Rosemary (*Rosmarinum officinalis*)

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

Pest control tip

Vine weevil infestations can become a problem with container growing. Use organic biological controls or make a corrugated cardboard trap for the adults to hide in, then remove them.