



# How to create a community garden

**There are 10 basic steps to follow to develop your outdoor space for both wildlife and people, as St James', Finchampstead has done.**

## 1. Don't be too tidy

**Whatever size your piece of land is, remember to leave a bit to be wild. We like to tidy up.**

Wildlife prefers a bit of untidiness, because that creates habitats. Even a few stinging nettles left to grow in a corner will provide a place for butterflies to lay their eggs. Most of our most colourful and well-known butterflies depend on a patch of nettles for the growth of their larvae. So, leave some stingers and watch out for Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma butterflies.

## 2. Take out invasive species

**Having said that, it's important to take out invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron, where they're running wild and preventing other plants from flourishing.**

If things have got a bit out of hand, as they had at Finchampstead, this is a job to do with a group of gardening volunteers, over a period of time. Do it in bite-sized chunks so it feels manageable. You can re-use the wood to edge borders and paths, or create habitats (see below).

In Finchampstead, clearing the scrub brought in top predators such as red kites and buzzards, so keep an eye out for the wildlife that moves in where you've created a space.

If you want to replant trees, consider planting native trees such as hazel, ash and rowan. You can apply for grants from our friends at the Woodland Trust. [Link here: [woodlandtrust.org.uk/freetrees](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/freetrees)]

## 3. Create habitats for insects

**It couldn't be simpler: create piles of logs in out-of-the-way parts of your patch and these will soon become homes to insects. Choose a semi-shady spot away from trees.**

Stack a group of logs on top of each other, and stop them from rolling away by driving a stake into each side. Keep the wood damp by burying the first layer of logs a few inches into the soil.

What will thrive there? Well, according to the charity Buglife, some 2,000 sorts of British invertebrates live on dead wood. Watch out for stag beetles, ants, worms, beetles, woodlice and centipedes.

## 4. Create a meadow under fruit trees

**Britain has lost 97 per cent of its meadowland since the Second World War.**

With it have gone all the species of insect and butterfly that are not only part of our heritage and co-sharers of the environment, but also create the start of the food chain. Incorporating a meadow under some fruit trees can be done in a small area.



Creating an area of wildflower meadow will bring in wildlife. Watch out for the Meadow Brown, Marbled White and Large Skipper butterflies, as well as Golden-Ringed Dragonflies and grasshoppers. But a multitude of bugs, spiders and even the odd shrew will appreciate the long-grass habitat.

An area of meadow will add movement and texture to any landscape. Just imagine long grasses blowing in the wind and immediately, you'll start to feel more relaxed. Meadowland is great for people as well as wildlife. Find out more about how to do this. [[Link to main How To resources](#)]

## 5. Plant hedgerows

**If you have a large piece of land, planting hedges creates divisions, giving you natural outdoor rooms, each with its own purpose. Hedges are also great for bordering your patch of land.**

They will act as windbreaks, absorb pollution, and even help reduce the air temperature. So, hedges are great for people. But they're a wonderful habitat for wildlife too.

A hedgerow can be home to hundreds of species. Look out for hedgehogs, mice, frogs, toads and squirrels as well as many birds.

Some 200,000 miles of hedgerows have been destroyed in Britain since the Second World War. That's the equivalent of going eight times around the world.

However small your patch, you can redress the balance with some hedging. Plant a diverse mix of native British broadleaf saplings. You can apply for a free hedging pack from our friends at the Woodland Trust. [[Link here: woodlandtrust.org.uk/freetrees](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/freetrees)].

## 6. Create a water feature

**The gardening team at Finchampstead installed a solar-powered fountain which acts as a bird bath. These cost about £80-90 from all good suppliers. Birds come in all day to drink and to wash.**

It's not just birds that love water. It also attracts insects, including damsel flies and dragonflies. Bigger expanses of water will also attract bats, during their night-time flights.

Because the water feature is near to a couple of benches, this is a lovely place for people to sit and watch the wildlife.

If you want to do this on a budget, use an old washing up bowl, dig it into the ground, and create a mini pond. To find out how, visit: [[Link to main How To resources](#)]

## 7. Create a remembrance garden

**At Finchampstead, a Remembrance Garden has been created. People whose loved ones have died donate a plant for the herbaceous border. There's a place to sit and look at the plants through the seasons, and remember those who have been loved and lost.**

It's also possible to dedicate a tree to a loved one at Finchampstead. These help to create a hedge along the border of the plot.

Planting a tree or a perennial plant can be a really positive way to remember those we have loved, as it is a growing thing, a sign of hope for the future.



## 8. Get the community involved

**Your garden will flourish more as the community buys into it and makes it its own. At one level, this means encouraging green-fingered locals to take part and offer their skills.**

On another, it might mean engaging the support of any local organisation that could contribute. In Finchampstead, people who loved gardening were encouraged to take part. Being a church member was not important.

Now, the gardens are used extensively by the community from youth events through to WI lunches and concerts.

If you're creating a garden in a church yard, you may need to seek permission from your church authorities for things like tree-planting and the placement of benches.

If you're short of keen gardeners – and that's unlikely – think laterally. Is there a horticultural society in your town, or are there allotments? Would any of those people like to join in with your community garden?

## 9. Make a plan

**Before developing any garden, whether at home or in the community, ask yourself the same question: what do you want to do out here? Your answer will help you decide what to do with the space.**

So, if you want an area where families can play with their children, you'll be thinking about grass, meadow, seating and some trees to create shade.

If, on the other hand, you want to create a sanctuary for wildlife, you'll be considering keeping areas unkempt, creating log piles and putting up bird boxes.

The Finchampstead team wanted a space that could be used by individuals and the wider community, and that would enable wildlife to flourish. It has developed a bit at a time, clearing brambles and scrub over years rather than months, and so making big tasks seem manageable.

Its latest plan includes laying out a labyrinth – to be used as a prayer walk – with 529 tiles that had been in the church until a recent refurbishment.

The Finchampstead team's top tip is: do a bit at a time. That way you'll feel encouraged and motivated, rather than disheartened. Why not consider taking photos of each day's gardening and share them on social media? That will provide a tangible record of what has been achieved and how things have changed, which you can easily forget.

## 10. Put up bird boxes

**Bird boxes have been put up in trees around the gardens at Finchampstead. The team's recently added a couple of swift boxes in the roof of the church hall.**

There are never enough holes and hideaways for birds, according to the RSPB. So we can help them by putting up nest boxes. These are simple to make and give your gardening team something to do over the winter months.

According to the RSPB, the record number of birds found in one nesting box was 63 wrens! So, by putting up just one box, you'll be creating a home for a family.



If you've got larger trees, consider erecting owl boxes. And if you have permission to do so, swift boxes can be installed under the eaves or in the roof.

If you are doing a community garden in a Church of England church yard, don't forget to talk to your Diocese first to obtain the right permissions.

## Reflect

After you've done your gardening, why not take a few minutes over a cuppa to reflect on what Psalm 23 means to you as a group, a reflect on your gardening day? Use our handy resources: [psalm23garden.co.uk/reflections](https://psalm23garden.co.uk/reflections).



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