



Wildlife-Friendly Allotments

Composited off the Internet

By Gareth Richards

Wildlife-Friendly Allotments: Grow & Help

Turn your allotment into a wildlife haven without losing harvests. Pollinator strips, hedgehog highways, log piles, and no-dig methods that boost yields.



A wildlife-friendly allotment produces equal or higher yields than a conventional plot while supporting declining UK species. Pollinator strips along bed edges increase fruit set by 20-30% in runner beans and courgettes. A 13cm hedgehog highway under the plot boundary fence costs nothing and gives hedgehogs access to slug-rich ground. Log piles attract over 40 beetle species. No-dig methods preserve the 1,000+ earthworms per square metre that healthy allotment soil supports.

A wildlife-friendly allotment is not a compromise between growing food and helping nature. The two work together. Pollinator strips along your beds mean more bees on your bean flowers. Hedgehog highways through your boundary fence mean fewer slugs on your lettuce. Log piles from winter prunings attract the ground beetles that eat cabbage root fly larvae. Every wildlife feature on a well-managed plot pays its way in higher yields and fewer pest problems.

Why do wildlife-friendly allotments produce more food?
The connection between wildlife and yield is direct. Pollinating insects increase fruit set in runner beans, courgettes, squash, and broad beans. Without bees, these crops drop flowers and produce fewer fruits. Research from the University of Reading found that plots within 50m of wildflower strips showed 20-30% higher fruit set in pollinator-dependent crops.

Predatory insects and mammals provide pest control that no chemical can match. A single hedgehog eats 40-80 slugs per night. Ground beetles consume caterpillar eggs, aphids, and root fly larvae. Hoverfly larvae each eat 400-800 aphids before pupating. Encouraging these species costs nothing and works every night without reapplication.

The Royal Horticultural Society campaigns for wildlife-friendly gardening across the UK. Their research confirms that gardens and allotments managed for wildlife show measurably higher biodiversity without sacrificing productivity.

What are the best pollinator strips for allotment edges?
Pollinator strips are narrow bands of flowering plants sown along bed edges, path margins, or fence lines. They provide nectar and pollen from early spring through late autumn, keeping beneficial insects on your plot rather than miles away.

Three seed mixes that work on allotments

Not all wildflower mixes suit allotment conditions. You need flowers that tolerate the rich, fertile soil of a vegetable plot and do not spread aggressively into beds.

Seed Mix Type	Cornfield annual
Best Flowers	Poppy, cornflower, corn marigold, corn chamomile
Sowing Time	March-April
Flowers From	June year 1
Cost per 10m Strip	£3-5

Seed Mix Type	Perennial pollinator
Best Flowers	Red clover, bird's-foot trefoil, ox-eye daisy, knapweed
Sowing Time	Sept-Oct
Flowers From	May year 2
Cost per 10m Strip	£5-8

Seed Mix Type	Annual/perennial blend
Best Flowers	All of the above plus yarrow and wild carrot
Sowing Time	March or Sept
Flowers From	June year 1, better year 2+
Cost per 10m Strip	£6-10

Sow a strip 30-50cm wide along one edge of each bed. This is narrow enough to avoid losing growing space but wide enough for bees to find. Emorsgate Seeds and Landlife Wildflowers sell UK-origin mixes suited to fertile soil. Avoid mixes designed for poor chalk grassland, they fail on rich allotment ground.

For more on creating wildflower areas, see our guide to sowing wildflower seeds and our mini meadow guide.

How do I create a hedgehog highway on my allotment?

Hedgehogs need to roam 1-2km per night to find enough food. Solid fences and walls block their routes and confine them to small areas. A hedgehog highway is a 13cm square hole cut at the base of a fence panel, allowing hedgehogs to pass through.

Positioning the highway

Cut the hole at ground level on the boundary between your plot and the neighbouring one, or between your plot and the site perimeter. One hole per fence panel is ideal but even a single gap makes a difference. Talk to neighbouring plot holders and encourage them to add matching holes on their boundaries.

How do log piles and brash heaps boost biodiversity?

A log pile is the single easiest wildlife feature to add to any allotment. Stack thick logs at the base, thinner branches on top, and leave the pile in a shaded corner. Within weeks, beetles, woodlice, centipedes, spiders, and fungi colonise the wood. Within a year, the pile supports a complete food web.

What lives in a log pile?

Stag beetle larvae spend 3-5 years feeding on decaying wood before emerging as adults. Ground beetles shelter under logs by day and hunt slug eggs at night. Toads use log piles as daytime refuges during summer and hibernation sites in winter. Solitary bees nest in beetle holes in older logs.

A single log pile of 1m x 1m x 50cm attracts over 40 invertebrate species. Position it in partial shade to keep the wood damp. Avoid treated or painted timber. Fruit tree prunings, elder, and willow decay fastest and attract colonisers within the first season.

Can you make a wildlife pond from a washing-up bowl?

You can. A sunken washing-up bowl or large plastic tub makes a micro-pond that attracts frogs, newts, dragonflies, and water beetles within the first summer. You do not need a liner, pump, or filter. Dig a hole the size of the bowl, sink it to ground level, and add a few centimetres of soil to the bottom.

Setting up an allotment micro-pond

Fill with rainwater, not tap water. Add a native oxygenating plant such as hornwort or starwort. Place a half-submerged stone or piece of wood as a ramp so wildlife can climb in and out. Frogs and newts arrive without being introduced, they find water by scent and humidity.

Even this small body of water supports a breeding population of common frogs, whose tadpoles grow into adults that eat slugs across your entire plot. For larger projects, our wildlife pond guide and container pond guide cover construction, planting, and maintenance.

How does no-dig growing protect soil wildlife?

No-dig growing means adding compost or mulch to the soil surface and never turning it with a spade or fork. This preserves the underground ecosystem that makes soil fertile: earthworm tunnels, mycorrhizal fungal networks, and the burrows of ground-nesting beetles and solitary bees.

The numbers behind no-dig

Healthy allotment soil contains over 1,000 earthworms per square metre. Each worm pulls organic matter down, aerates the soil, and deposits nutrient-rich casts.

Digging destroys these tunnels and kills worms directly. Research from the Garden Organic trial grounds found 60-70% more earthworms in no-dig beds compared to conventionally dug plots after three years.

Mycorrhizal fungi form networks that connect plant roots and transport nutrients across distances. Digging severs these networks. On a no-dig plot, plants access phosphorus and micronutrients more efficiently, reducing the need for added fertiliser. Our full no-dig gardening guide covers bed construction, mulching, and weed control.

Should I avoid peat on a wildlife-friendly allotment?

Yes. Peat extraction destroys lowland bogs that are among the UK's most important wildlife habitats. Peat bogs store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined. They also support rare species including sundews, sphagnum mosses, and large heath butterflies.

Peat-free alternatives work just as well on an allotment. Home-made compost, well-rotted manure, leaf mould, and municipal green waste compost all improve soil structure and fertility. For seed sowing, peat-free composts from Melcourt, Dalefoot, and SylvaGrow perform as well as peat-based mixes in independent trials. Our peat-free compost guide compares every major brand.

What companion planting controls pests without chemicals?

Companion planting uses the natural properties of certain plants to repel, confuse, or trap pest insects. It replaces chemical pesticides with biological interactions that support the wider food web rather than destroying it.

Practice	Slug control
Conventional Approach	Metaldehyde pellets
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Hedgehog highways + beer traps
Benefit to Wildlife	Hedgehogs thrive, no poison in food chain
Practice	Aphid control
Conventional Approach	Synthetic pyrethroid spray
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Nasturtium trap crops + hoverfly strips
Benefit to Wildlife	Hoverflies, ladybirds, and lacewings breed
Practice	Whitefly on tomatoes
Conventional Approach	Chemical fumigation
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	French marigold interplanting
Benefit to Wildlife	Parasitic wasps establish naturally

Practice	Carrot fly
Conventional Approach	Insecticide drench
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Onion/leek interplanting + 60cm barriers
Benefit to Wildlife	Ground beetles and rove beetles survive
Practice	Cabbage caterpillars
Conventional Approach	Netting only
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Netting + log piles for beetle shelter
Benefit to Wildlife	Ground beetles eat eggs at night
Practice	Weed control
Conventional Approach	Glyphosate paths
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Woodchip paths + cardboard mulch
Benefit to Wildlife	Soil life preserved under mulch

Practice	Soil fertility
Conventional Approach	Synthetic NPK fertiliser
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Compost + green manure + legume rotation
Benefit to Wildlife	Earthworms, fungi, and bacteria thrive
Practice	Pest monitoring
Conventional Approach	Calendar spraying
Wildlife-Friendly Alternative	Daily walkabout + trap inspection
Benefit to Wildlife	Spraying only if threshold reached

French marigolds (*Tagetes patula*) are the most effective companion plant for allotments. Their roots exude alpha-terthienyl, which kills soil nematodes. Their flowers attract hoverflies, whose larvae consume aphids. Plant them at the end of every tomato, bean, and brassica row. Our companion planting guide covers 30+ proven combinations.

How do I set up bird boxes on an allotment shed?

Bird boxes on allotment sheds attract blue tits, great tits, and robins, all of which feed caterpillars to their young. A single blue tit family consumes an estimated 10,000 caterpillars during the breeding season. That is free pest control targeting the exact species that eat your brassicas.

Box placement

Fix boxes at 2-3m height on the shady side of the shed, facing north or east to avoid direct afternoon sun. Use a 25mm entrance hole for blue tits or 28mm for great tits. Position boxes in October so birds find them during winter territory scouting. Space multiple boxes at least 10m apart, as most small birds are territorial.

What are wildflower headlands and do they work?

A wildflower headland is a strip of permanent wildflower planting around the perimeter of your plot. Farm headlands have been studied by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and results translate directly to allotments. A 1m-wide headland around a half plot provides continuous forage for pollinators from April to October.

Establishing a headland

Mark out a 1m strip along one or more edges of your plot. Scrape back the top 5cm of soil to reduce fertility, wildflowers thrive on poorer ground. Sow a perennial meadow mix in September. Do not cut until late August the following year, then cut and remove the cuttings to keep fertility low.

Plants to include: knapweed, field scabious, yarrow, ox-eye daisy, bird's-foot trefoil, and self-heal. These all tolerate the clay soils common on allotment sites across the Midlands and support specialist pollinators including long-tongued bumblebees. For identification help, see our wildflower identification guide.

How do I avoid peat and still make good compost?

Build two or three compost bays from pallets. Fill with a mix of green waste (kitchen peelings, grass clippings, annual weeds) and brown waste (cardboard, straw, woody prunings). Turn monthly for fast results or leave for 12 months for a hands-off approach.

Good allotment compost feeds the soil and the organisms living in it. Worms, woodlice, brandling worms, and thousands of microbial species break down raw materials into humus. A well-made heap reaches 60-70 degrees Celsius internally, killing weed seeds and pathogens. Our composting guide covers bay design, ratios, and troubleshooting. For composting that directly supports wildlife, our composting for wildlife guide explains how to manage heaps as habitat for slow worms, toads, and grass snakes.

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How do I make a hedgehog highway on an allotment?

Cut a 13cm square hole at the base of your boundary fence. Use a jigsaw or panel saw. Position it at ground level so hedgehogs can pass through at night. One hole per fence panel is ideal. Hedgehogs eat 40-80 slugs per night, making them the best organic pest control on any plot.

Will a mini pond attract mosquitoes to my allotment?

Not if you add a few aquatic plants and leave it for wildlife. Frogs, newts, and dragonfly larvae eat mosquito larvae faster than they can breed. A pond with barley straw and native oxygenating plants stays balanced. Stagnant water in open containers breeds mosquitoes. A planted pond does not.

Can I use companion planting instead of pesticides on an allotment?

Yes, companion planting reduces pest damage significantly. French marigolds repel whitefly from tomatoes. Nasturtiums lure aphids away from beans and brassicas. Carrots grown alongside onions confuse carrot fly. *Tagetes patula* produces a root compound that kills soil nematodes. These methods work best as part of a broader wildlife-friendly approach.

What should I do with prunings and hedge clippings on an allotment?

Stack them in a quiet corner as a log or brash pile. Dead wood supports over 40 beetle species, provides shelter for hedgehogs and toads, and breaks down into rich humus over 3-5 years. Keep log piles shaded and damp. Stack thick logs at the base and thinner branches on top. Never burn allotment prunings if you can stack them instead.

Is no-dig growing better for wildlife than conventional digging?
No-dig preserves soil structure and protects underground life.
Digging destroys earthworm tunnels, fungal networks, and ground beetle habitat. A no-dig bed mulched with compost supports 60-70% more earthworms than a dug bed. Earthworms pull organic matter down, aerate soil, and improve drainage naturally.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

gareth.richards@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contribute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

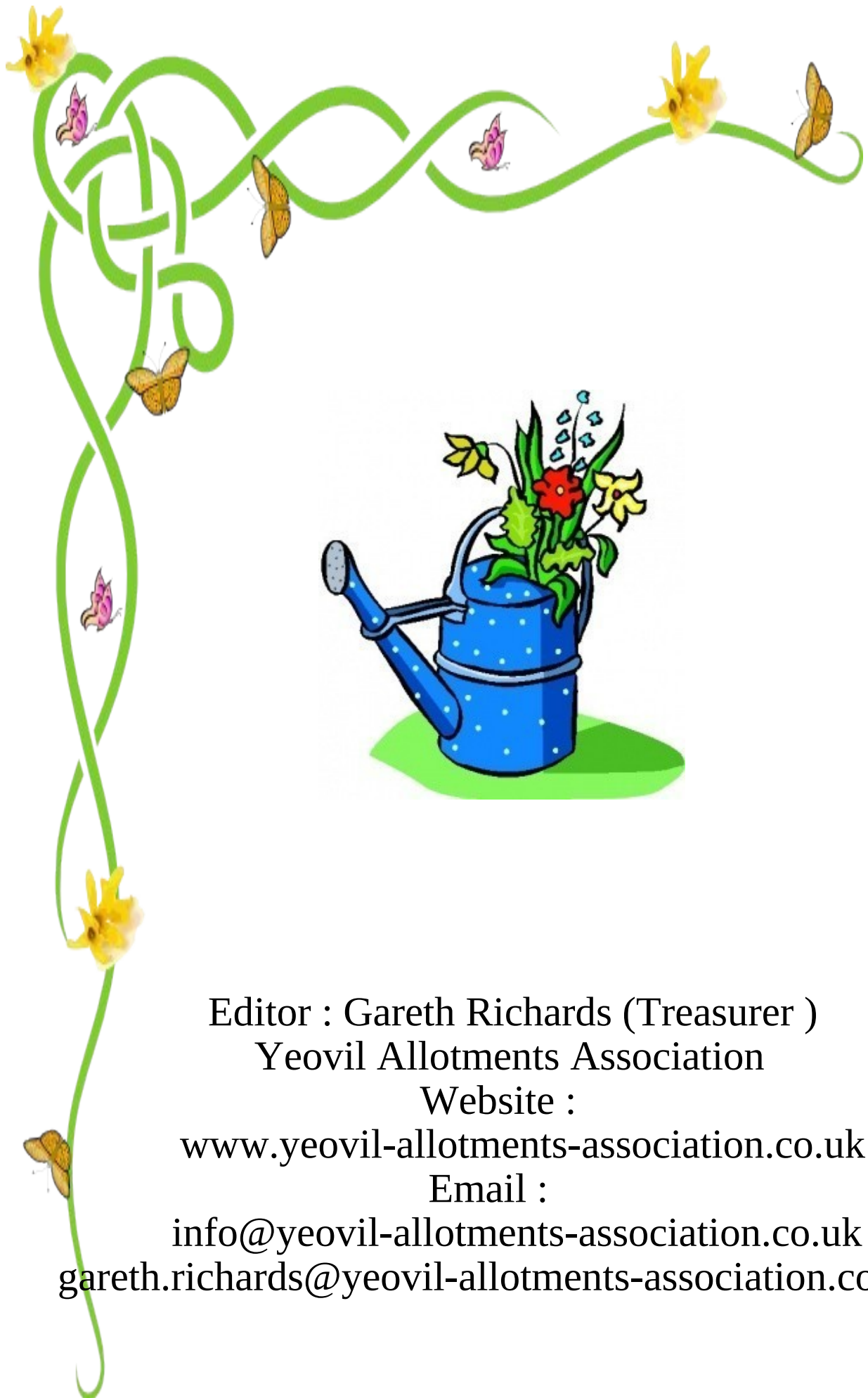
where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

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