



How to wild up your decking

SKILL LEVEL: ■■■■■

TIME OF YEAR: ALL YEAR ROUND

WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY: Adding planted containers to your wooden decking creates refuges for animals as they travel through your garden. There's very little that won't grow in a container. The result can be an attractive and rich greenspace that benefits people and wildlife.

CLIMATE-FRIENDLY: Planted containers will help cool your decking area as plants retain and release moisture and create shade.

WHERE TO BUY MATERIALS: A good independent garden centre (try to shop locally where possible).

GARDEN FOR A LIVING LONDON

As our climate changes, gardens are becoming even more vital to wildlife and people.

They can provide shade, absorb carbon, soak up flood water and help to cool buildings. A well managed network of gardens stretching across the capital would also help wildlife to move more freely and adapt to climate change.

London Wildlife Trust's 'Garden for a Living London' campaign is asking Londoners to do one thing to create a wildlife and climate friendly garden. This 'How to' guide shows how to wild up your decking. Follow the simple tips and get your garden working to help our city and its wildlife cope with climate change.

For more information on our campaign and to pledge your support visit www.wildlondon.org.uk/gardening

Planning your containers

What type of container? Most plastic and metal containers retain moisture better than clay ones but they're often less attractive or not as sustainably produced. Why not be creative and consider using old tyres, sinks, cans, buckets, a shoe or a teapot - anything that holds soil and water and allows excess water to drain.

What size? Choose containers that are the right size for your plants. Pots that are too small will restrict root growth and you'll need to re-pot before the plant becomes established.

Preparing your containers

1. Make a few drainage holes in old plastic sacks and use them to line ceramic containers to retain moisture.
2. For drainage, add a layer about 5cm deep of rocks, broken pots, polystyrene chips or gravel.
3. Fill the container with good peat-free compost.
4. Leave a gap of about 5cm between the compost and the top of the pot to allow air to circulate, this will make watering easier and leave space for an annual top dressing of mulch.

Choosing your plants

Light levels and exposure Think about how much light your plants need and whether containers will be exposed to wind or frost.

Variety Consider growing plants of different sizes and types to appeal to a wider range of wildlife.

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How to wild up your decking (cont'd)

Year-round interest Think about planting containers with early and late spring and summer bulbs around a trailing ivy or evergreen fern.

Easy access Put lower growing plants at the front of your deck and taller ones at the back.

Herbs These do well in containers and planting on a deck makes them easy to get to.

Vertical gardens Climbing plants, such as honeysuckle, jasmine and clematis, grow successfully in containers. If you train them up a wall or pergola you can create vertical habitat for insects and nesting birds.

Think big Large shrubs and some trees do very well in larger containers and provide extra habitat for wildlife.

Looking after your containers

Watering Follow our tips to make watering easier:

- Grow plants that like drier conditions, such as *Pelargonium*, herbs, alpines, *Eryngium*, lavender, box, *Cistus*, *Fatsia*, *Ceanothus*, holly and *Mahonia*.
- Try to use rain water collected in a water butt and water during early morning or evening as less water will evaporate than during the heat of the day.
- Supply just enough water to reach the bottom of the container in a trickle, rather than pouring away wastefully.

Feeding

- Treat your plants to a regular organic feed and always feed when the soil is moist so that fertiliser does not drain straight out.
- Top dress the pots every year with about 5cm of peat-free organic compost which will nourish the soil and help to retain moisture.

Position

- Keep your containers close together. This allows the plants to shelter each other and increases the cooling effect of their leaves.
- Try to connect your containers to other green spaces to help wildlife move around your garden.

Tidying up

- Don't be too rigorous in tidying up fallen leaves because they provide shade and escape routes for some wildlife.

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