



**CORONATION  
GARDENS**  
For food & nature

For schools

# Your guide to growing food in a wildlife-friendly way



SHUTTERSTOCK

2025

[mycoronationgarden.org](http://mycoronationgarden.org)

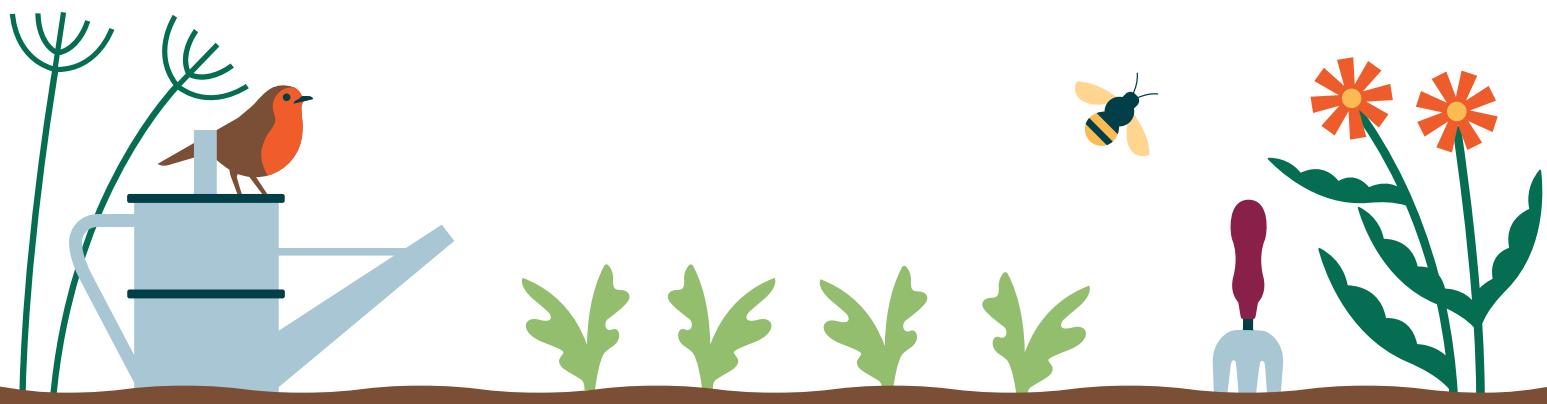
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# Welcome



**CORONATION  
GARDENS**  
For food & nature

Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature is an exciting partnership between four well-loved national organisations – The National Federation of Women's Institutes, Garden Organic, Incredible Edible and The Wildlife Trusts. Together, we have one aim: to encourage and inspire everyone to grow some food in a wildlife-friendly way!

It doesn't matter where your school is or if you have any outside space, or even whether you're a complete beginner or an experienced gardener – this pack has something for you. We'll show you how to choose the right plants to fit in with term times and holidays, and offer advice about planting, growing and harvesting, all in harmony with nature. We've even got some tips about what to do with your fantastic produce!



We know from joint research conducted by the University of Derby and The Wildlife Trusts that being active in nature can support everyone's health and well-being. So, as well as having massive benefits for pupils, this will bring a little bit of green magic into your lives, and maybe even the community and natural world all around your school too.

Last year, this guide for schools helped hundreds of schools across the UK to grow a little more food, benefiting wildlife and pupils alike. We've listened to your feedback and hope that you'll find even more useful information in this year's resource. We're delighted that so many of you have supported Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature – don't forget to log your school on our map, which will allow you to download your certification of participation.

[Just click here!](#)

We hope you enjoy what nature has in store for you, and we wish you all every success!

Autumn  
The Coronation Gardens  
for Food & Nature team



The  
**Wildlife**  
Trusts



**INCREDIBLE  
EDIBLE C.I.C.**

the **WI**

garden  
**organic**

# Assess your space

By understanding your space, you'll have a good idea of any variables that might impact your food growing ambitions and come up with a plan to address them! Start by working through these 'get started' questions.

## Where in the British Isles are you?

If you are sowing seeds outside, then watch out for frost! You might need to adjust the planting dates that you read online or on seed packets, as the dates they give are based on averages. In the south of England, you might be able to sow a few weeks earlier than the suggested times, but if you are in Scotland, then you could wait a few extra weeks. Don't feel that you must stick to what it says on the packet of seeds. A little later could be better than too early.

### TOP TIP

Find an [interactive last frost map online here](#).

The last frost map is just a guide. You will also be affected by local conditions. Coastal areas may have less frost. If your growing space is enclosed by a wall, you won't get as much frost. A sunny south-facing slope will be warmer than a patch in the north shadow of trees or buildings.



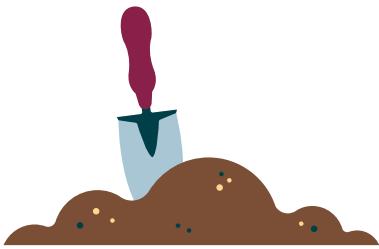
## What do you already have?

If you have an outside space, get your class out there with clipboards and pencils, and make an audit of it. Look for narrow strips of land, old or abandoned containers, raised beds and previous plots. Is there some 'dead space' not being used that could fit a few big pots? You'll be amazed at what you can fit into a small patch of land.

Schools (particularly within urban settings) with no outside space need not be discouraged! Windowsills, the tops of walls, concrete paths – anywhere you can squeeze a pot, you can grow something. Check out [Garden Organic's factsheet here](#), all

about square foot growing and using small spaces.

And what about looking around your local area? Conduct a safari around the streets surrounding your school, hunting for pocket parks, patches of land outside shops and businesses, or corners of public spaces, and start a conversation with the owners. We have advice on finding out who owns land on the [online community hub](#). We have found lots of councils are often very willing to support community growing spaces. Find out more about [Incredible Edible's Right to Grow campaign here](#) and access their resources on [working with councils here](#).



## What's the soil like?

Sandy soils are very easy to dig and drain water well, but they don't have many nutrients. At the other end of the scale, clay soils can be waterlogged and hard to dig, but they hold on to their nutrients well. The best soils are in between these two extremes and are called loamy soils.

Soils also fall on a scale of acid to alkaline. Sandy soils can be quite acidic but you can improve that by adding organic matter (e.g. manure or bark chippings). Peaty soils can also be rather acidic. Clay soils can be slightly acidic or neutral to slightly alkaline. Soils in limestone areas, or any lime-rich soil, will be more alkaline.

A pH reading of 7 is neutral, and anything below this is acidic. In fact, most vegetables prefer slightly acidic soil, with a pH of between 6.5 and 7.

## TOP TIP

Download this [complete guide to soils from Garden Organic here](#). You will learn

how to test your soil, and how to improve it so you can grow whatever you want.

If you are growing in containers or raised beds, you don't need to test and change the soil at all, because you can buy the right acidic to neutral compost.

## Where's the sun?

'Aspect' describes where and when your plot gets the sun. So, a garden with a south-facing aspect just means that the garden faces south and gets a lot of sun during the day, unless there are big buildings or trees that cast a lot of shade. A south-facing plot can often be very sunny and hot, and you might have to do lots of watering!

Don't worry if you have a north plot. This will still get the sun between May and October, and if there is shade when it's midday, many vegetables will thank you. However, a north-facing plot can take longer to warm up in the spring, so you might need to wait a week or two longer for sowing seeds.

A west-facing plot will get the sun in the afternoon, and in the summer, this sunlight can be quite strong – so again might need more watering.

A plot facing east will benefit from the slightly cooler morning sun and could be in shade when it's very hot in the summer.

## What about accessibility?

If you have raised beds, or someone willing to make them, then they can benefit everyone, not just wheelchair users. However, be aware they often need more soil and compost than you might think!

If you have large outdoor space and are lucky enough to be planning raised beds, make sure that the paths in between are wide enough for wheelchairs, mobility aids, scooters and of course wheelbarrows.

How will people know what's growing? Think about signs and posters that are in a variety of languages, Easy Read, and braille. And while a range of textures and scents is great, do avoid spiky plants and bushes along walkways and the edges of planted areas.



# What to grow all year round - inside

## Herbs

Many herbs can be grown inside at any time, and they can be taken home over the summer if you have willing volunteers.

Easy to grow herbs include:

- Basil
- Mint
- Chives
- Lemon balm
- Thyme
- Fennel
- Dill and coriander need a fair bit of space and may be better in containers outside
- Parsley can be tricky to germinate so read the packet carefully



## TOP TIP

Consider reaching out to community groups involved in growing, such as Incredible Edible. You can [find your local group here](#), and they might have volunteers who are willing to help care for your plot during the summer months.

## Salad

Salads are great to grow inside and you can sow the seeds every few weeks for ongoing harvests.

Good salad options include:

- Lettuces (loads of types but choose leafy ones/cut and come again rather than the typical "head" lettuces like iceberg)
- Rocket
- Spinach
- Mustard
- Microgreens
- Cress

For a bit of fun and to re-use otherwise waste products you can grow cress, mustard and microgreens in eggshells!

Then branch out into pak choi, chard, and kale



## What to do about the Summer Break?

Growing perennial herbs, which grow year after year, can be tricky. Even though things like lavender, sage, rosemary, thyme and bay are Mediterranean and can survive some drought, they will need watering over the summer if you live in a hotter, drier area. In many places, they will survive if they are large plants outside and



DAMERS FIRST SCHOOL, DORSET

well-established in the ground. However, they all grow well in pots and containers so perhaps someone could adopt them and take them home until September.

If you have a willing local volunteer who could water things over the summer break, then you can plant many things before you break up, though you will need to discuss this with the person responsible for site security and access over the holidays. You will be able to come back and harvest things in the Autumn Term, such as runner beans, French beans, beet, broccoli, sprouts, cauli, leek, onion, parsnip and squash (and what about planning for pumpkins at Halloween)?

## HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE RHUBARB TRIANGLE?

There's a nine-square-mile area in West Yorkshire that once grew 90% of our rhubarb – and it's all done in complete darkness! "Rhubarb forcing sheds" are huge buildings that grow rhubarb by candlelight during the winter. It makes the rhubarb especially tender and sweet – perfect for a rhubarb crumble!

# Top five term-time plants for containers

## Choosing your container

While we encourage a plastic-free lifestyle, it's important to remember that plastic was invented for a reason – longevity and durability. Those qualities make it a problem when it's used once and dumped, but actually if you are going to reuse plastic pots, there's no reason to avoid it. Terracotta pots, while they look great, are often not frost-hardy. **A good quality plastic pot** can be used again and again, and is a better investment than a cheap one that will break after one season.

**Wooden containers** can be built by anyone with minimal tools and skills – search online for instructions. Many schools may also find willing parents and carers that are happy to help out. However, wood can rot. Pressure-treated wood is a good choice as it

won't need maintenance, but it will need lining with plastic as the chemicals used to treat the wood can affect the plants. Timber designed to be used in outdoor construction (such as tanalised timber) is another good choice.

You may need to protect the wood with a wood stain (which soaks into the wood) or paint (this sits on the surface). Ask around as people often have half-used tins in their sheds, the perfect quantity for planters.

Use stainless steel screws that won't go rusty. And don't forget to add drainage holes!



## TOP TIP

There are lots of creative ways to reuse and upcycle containers, too. [Incredible Edible have a useful guide here\\*](#)

Alternatively, if you are buying containers, don't just look in the usual garden centres. Many budget high street shops to supermarkets will have a range of useful containers and planters.



\*To access these resources, simply make a free account

# Top five term-time plants for containers



GARDEN ORGANIC



MARCUS SPISKE/UNsplash

## Top five

- 1 **Herbs like lavender, mint, sage and thyme**
- 2 **Tomatoes**
- 3 **Lettuce**
- 4 **Radish**
- 5 **Strawberries**



Many herbs are excellent choices for containers.

They are perennial so they keep on growing, year after year. A lot are evergreen, too. An added advantage of mint, sage and thyme is that they are easy to grow from seed.



Strawberries are another great choice for a plant that keeps on giving.



Lettuces come in many different sorts, and you can stagger their sowing so you can have a crop over weeks or months.



Tomato plants can grow in a grow bag or container, although to harvest before the summer holidays, you might need to start them off inside and protect them when you plant out. Look for hardy varieties that are happy outside – they don't all need to be in greenhouses. Although people often grow tomatoes from

young plants, you can sow seeds too. However, avoid trying to use seeds from tomatoes that you have bought in shops. They are often 'hybrid' or 'F1 hybrid' varieties that won't flourish. If your school has been growing heirloom varieties, however, you will have much more success and can grow these in successive summers. Think of the savings!

Smaller veg varieties, known as 'dwarf' varieties, usually reach harvest faster so they are useful for schools who need a crop before August. And look for keywords like 'bush habit' or 'compact' in the descriptions. Cherry tomatoes ripen faster than full size tomatoes, and are also easier to share among a class!

## WATCH OUT!

In long, hot summers, container plants can dry out very quickly. If you want your herbs to survive, perhaps you can "adopt" them over the summer so you can continue to water them at home?



# Top five term-time plants for bigger outside spaces

## Considering tools

Consider whether you need to purchase tools. Many areas of the UK have 'tool libraries', though there is no national register of these, so you'll need to search online for 'tool library' and include your area name. In London there is also the 'library of things', which charges a small fee for borrowing items but can be useful if you need a tool for a one-off task like rotavating. You may also want to reach out to your local [Men's Shed](#) who can often help. Think about putting a call out to parents, carers and the local community too – you may be amazed at how many people donate unused hand trowels!

Once you know where you're getting your tools from, consider where you will store them before picking them up. You will need a secure area. There are plastic and metal storage sheds, which can be locked, available in garden centres and online. Metal sheds can suffer from condensation, so if you have one of these, make sure the tools are dried before storing them to prevent them from rusting. Even tools that claim to be rustproof often have screws or rivets that do rust. Perhaps there's a corner of the caretaker's area that can be used, or a garage?



## Top five

- 1 Autumn-fruiting raspberries and gooseberries
- 2 Carrots
- 3 Rhubarb
- 4 Peas
- 5 Sunflowers



## What do you like to eat?

Carrots, peas and sunflowers are classic plants to grow from seed. You can grow rhubarb from seed too, although the traditional way is to find a bag of it on your doorstep from a friendly neighbour, once word gets out that you are looking



for some! Rhubarb is very long-lived and a hardy plant, so people are often happy to share. You will probably need to buy or source raspberry canes and gooseberry bushes as small plants. Start with what you would like to cook or eat, and work back from there to plan your planting.

## WHAT'S IN THAT FIELD?

We grow enough potatoes in the UK to make 27.5 BILLION bags of crisps! Believe it or not, there are enough hedges in the UK to go around the world 20 times – but we've actually lost 20% of our hedges since 1950, so we used to have even more. Hedgerows are vital for wildlife.

Source: <https://cropscience.bayer.co.uk/blog/articles/2019/10/farming-facts>

# Top five term-time plants for inside

## Making seed pots

It's easy to make seed pots from the cardboard inners of toilet rolls, or you can use newspaper. If you are using newspaper, while you can buy wooden moulds relatively cheaply, you can use any cylindrical object like a clean jam jar.

■ Take one sheet of newspaper in front of you, horizontally (landscape). Fold the bottom upwards so you're folding it in half but leave about 5 centimetres at the top. Now fold that 5 centimetre flap at the top down. It's like an envelope.

■ Take the jam jar, with the open bit at the top where the folded flap is and roll the newspaper around it. Then tuck all the folded flaps into the open mouth of the jam jar.

■ When you take the jam jar out, you'll have a pot with a relatively loose, crumpled bottom. You can add a staple to the top if you want to hold it together more tightly – it depends on how many times you were able to wrap it around.

[See a video from Garden Organic here for more help.](#)

■ When your seedlings are growing strongly and the last frost has passed, you can plant the whole thing outside as the newspaper will rot away.



## Tips for growing inside

Bright sunny windowsills are ideal for growing most salads and herbs but watch out for the strong midday sun; you can add shade to south-facing windowsills using plain paper stuck to the windows. East and west-facing windows are equally good.

In hot weather, salad leaves like rocket and lettuce can 'bolt'. This means it sends up a flower spike and the taste of the leaves can change. Try to snip these stems off as soon as you see them, and you can carry on harvesting the leaves for a little longer.

Indoor plants can suffer from unwanted visitors just as those outdoors do. Be careful with hygiene. Always make sure you wash pots and containers before reusing them and use fresh peat-free compost rather than garden soil, which can move grubs and diseases inside. It's a good idea to water seedlings and indoor plants with tap water instead of collected rainwater, which can contain bacteria.



# Wildlife-friendly tips

## How to deter unwanted garden visitors

Pick them off by hand – keep an eye out for caterpillars, aphids, slugs and other vegetable chompers and handpick what the birds and hedgehogs don't get first. But with so many wonderful moths, butterflies and other insects declining, we'd recommend you leave a plant or two just for them – transfer your minibeasts to their own patch.



Wrap up your veg – use horticultural fleece to cover newly planted vegetables as a non-toxic means of control. Don't forget to provide plenty of other feeding opportunities for the more welcome visitors to your garden who would have eaten the minibeasts you've put off.

Stop slugs by creating a barrier that they won't want to cross. You might need to do some experimenting to find out what



works for you. Copper sometimes works, and wool pellets can work in the short-term. However, these do require some maintenance – reapplying is key. Take a look at The Wildlife Trusts' [Wild About Gardens advice](#).

(in partnership with the RHS) for more ideas.

## Pesticides vs natural control

One of the biggest steps towards growing vegetables with wildlife in mind is to stop using chemical pesticides. For starters, check out the [Principles of Organic Gardening from Garden Organic](#) or see [The Wildlife Trusts' advice here](#). Pesticides upset the natural balance of the environment and tend to kill everything off: 'pests' (which are wildlife too!) and their predators alike. Afterwards, some of these may even recover much quicker without their natural

predators to keep their numbers in check. So, try to be a bit more tolerant, and allow natural predators to do the work for you.

Given good soil conditions and no water stress, crops will grow strong and healthy, and will be more resistant to attack and diseases. High-nitrogen fertilisers can encourage sappy, leafy growth that's more vulnerable to attack, so make sure you have a compost heap to provide plenty of animal-friendly, all-purpose soil improver.



# Wildlife-friendly tips

## Establishing your vegetable garden

 Provide a decent environment for your veg to grow in – add plenty of compost or leaf mould into your plot as fertiliser, either dug in or mulched on top, and make sure it's well watered.



 You might like to give companion planting a go. The principle behind companion planting is that certain plants either attract insects away from your crops or deter them altogether. [Flowers also attract pollinators](#), which are essential for fruit and veg production. Marigolds are widely used to counter eelworms and, at the very least, brighten up your vegetable patch!

 Carrot flowers, like all umbellifers, are a big hit with many insects, especially aphid-eating hoverflies, so leave a few to flower.



 A nearby patch of weeds can be a bonus as it offers shelter to wildlife that can help gardeners by munching on those minibeasts that might take a fancy to your vegetables. And aromatic herbs are really popular with insects, so include things like borage, sage and mint in your veg plot. Sink them into the ground in their pots to stop them spreading.



# Breaking out of the school grounds

## What is the Right to Grow?

Incredible Edible is behind the Right to Grow campaign to enable all communities to access and use local pockets of unloved land to grow food. [You can find out more about their campaign here.](#)

Hull City Council is the first to begin the process to bring about the Right to Grow for all its residents. This means, in practice, that it will be documenting and mapping all potential public land that is suitable for community growing projects. It will also reduce or remove red tape and barriers to allow people to quickly and easily set up gardens, with free leases, and allow the communities to bid for the land should the council decide to sell it.

You can find out more about [Hull in The Guardian here.](#)



Many schools don't have suitable outdoor space to start food growing. But some schools are getting creative by seeking out patches of land near their school, and after obtaining permission from the landowner (often the council), they are turning them into pocket parks.

There's a great example in Derby where Arboretum Primary School has been supported by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to revitalise Society Place, adding planters of fruit and herbs, a bug hotel and trees. [Find out more in their video here.](#)



## FIND OUT MORE

Incredible Edible supports anyone who wants to join, or start, a local group. [Their website has a wide range of resources](#) and anyone can register to access them for free. Joining up with local support can also make your own growing project easier.

You can check the Incredible Edible website to find out if there is already a group near you, which you might be able to partner with. Their volunteers might even be able to help you with caring for your plot during school holidays.



# What to do with it all!

[Click here to check out more at the WI's Learning Hub!](#)

## Getting Crafty

The WI [has a range of inspiring crafts](#) on their website here.

Cooking might not be easy for some schools, depending on facilities, but there are lots of other things you can do with the class.

## [Make Your Own Volcano](#)

don't worry, it's quite small!

[Cabbage Indicators](#) – using what you grow as the basis of some chemistry experiments

[Turmeric as an Indicator](#) – testing for acids and alkalis

[Changing Chocolate](#) – does it really taste different if you've let it melt?

[Catalysis with Potato](#) – let's make bubbles

[Gummy Bear Experiment](#) – what is osmosis and how can you see it in action?



ANDY CHILTON/UNSPLASH



PAUL HARRIS 2020/VISION

**What can you cook with the produce we have listed?  
Try the following!**

### No cooking facilities:

- Salads, using rocket, sprouting seeds, lettuce, tomatoes, radish and carrots
- Smoothies using sprouting seeds or fresh fruit
- Drinks and cordials – mint, rhubarb
- Desserts using fresh fruit
- Salsa using tomatoes

### Hobs only:

- Tomato sauce for pasta
- Pesto for pasta using peas
- Soups – carrot, pea or tomato

### Access to ovens:

- Crumbles – rhubarb, apple, gooseberry
- Pies – rhubarb, apple, blackberry
- Dried sunflower seeds – to eat, feed birds, or for craft
- Roast veg such as tomatoes
- Carrot cake



# Going further

## FUNDING

We have information about where to start looking for funding on the [Nextdoor Nature Hub here](#).

There are points throughout the year when you can apply for [Local School Nature Grants](#) – keep an eye on the funding windows here.



## NETWORKS

[Garden Organic](#)

[Incredible Edible](#)

The Wildlife Gardening Forum has a regular, [informative newsletter here](#).



## RESOURCES

How much compost will you need to fill your containers? [Use this simple tool to find out online](#).

[Last frost map](#) for the UK

[The WI](#)

[The Wildlife Trusts](#)

Garden Organic offers [a course for schools](#) here. It is a self-paced, 2-hour online course, which has been designed primarily for early years and primary school practitioners who are new to growing in schools.

Download the [Greener Gardening Guide here](#)

Download your guide to [Taking Action for Insects](#) here

## National Education Nature Park

School grounds cover a vast area. If all the educational settings in the country committed to improving their sites for nature, there would be an area twice the size of Birmingham – thriving for wildlife!

That's why the Department for Education has commissioned the Natural History Museum, with the RHS and esri UK, to

lead the National Education Nature Park scheme. On their website here [<https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/>] you will find a vast array of free resources, training and help. It will support you and your school to build new connections to nature, develop your skills and confidence in teaching in and about nature, and will contribute to real scientific research into nature recovery.



# About Coronation Gardens For Food and Nature



**CORONATION GARDENS**  
For food & nature

In celebration of King Charles III's coronation, communities across the United Kingdom are pledging to live more sustainably and help wildlife recover by creating space for nature and homegrown food in their gardens and local greenspaces.

## Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature is a partnership between four organisations

Through campaigning, advice, community work, conservation and research, sustainable gardening charity [Garden Organic](#) helps gardeners cultivate a healthier, more biodiverse and sustainable world.

[Incredible Edible](#)'s vision is to create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food. If you eat, you're in.

[The WI](#) work to empower women to make positive contributions to their communities, campaign on a range of things that are important to them, support each other and find fun and friendship.

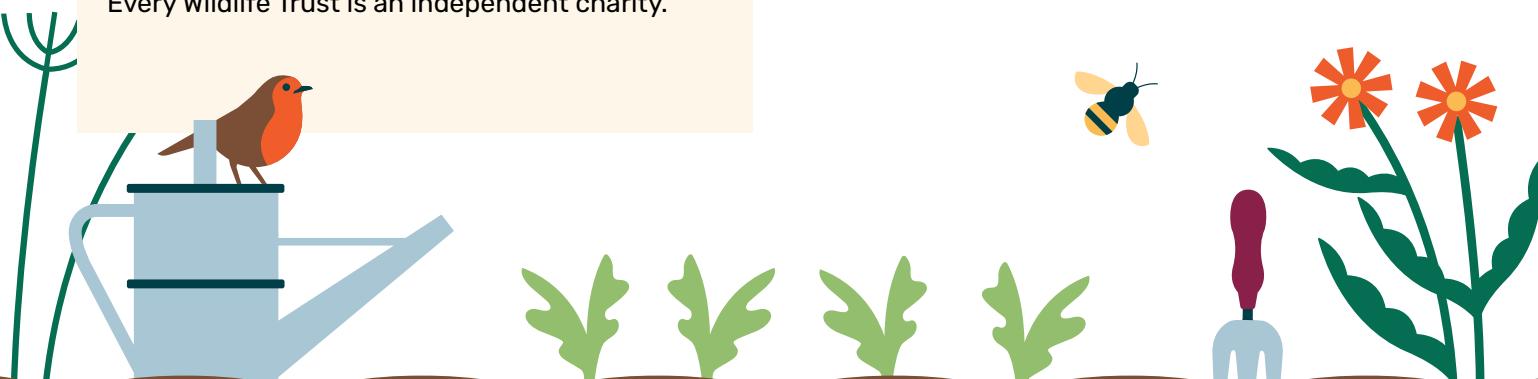
[The Wildlife Trusts](#) are a grassroots movement that believes we need nature and it needs us. Every Wildlife Trust is an independent charity.



[mycoronationgarden.org](http://mycoronationgarden.org)

#mycoronationgarden

This has been made possible by funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund



The  
**Wildlife**  
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organic**