



grow it

Activities



# Creating a wildlife tower

## Introduction

Wildlife habitats within school grounds can often look somewhat unsightly.

Examples are piles of rotting wood, tin cans or drinks bottles stuffed with straws and hung from branches. Although these are important habitats for wildlife, many people do prefer a neat tidy solution.

If you have a little bit of space which you can dedicate to being a 'wildlife area' for a long period of time the wildlife tower may be an option for you.

A few points to consider before you embark on building a wildlife tower:

- Location: the tower will be in place for a long time, so you need to choose an area that is not likely to be disturbed;
- Safety: the materials used to create the tower are likely to contain sharp edges, so it is important that the tower cannot be accessed by the children unsupervised. It is also important that children wear decent gloves when building, to prevent splinters and cuts;
- Materials: you will need to acquire a lot of materials before you can commence building. It is useful if you can store these near to the site, ready for use.

## Building the wildlife tower

### Materials

- Pallets, bricks, tiles and unused broken pipes – local building sites may be willing to donate. The overall height of the tower is determined by the number of pallets you can obtain.
- Bamboo canes cut into 15cm lengths – these need to be cut to length using a hacksaw, so it is advisable to prepare these before working with the children.
- Paper straws, which craft shops can supply.
- Hay or straw, bark chippings, and corrugated cardboard. Pet shops or garden centres are useful suppliers and they may even let you take old cardboard boxes if none are available in school.
- Broken terracotta or slate – garden centres may let you take away any broken pots to use, but if this is not possible you may need to buy bags of slate to use instead.

- Logs and sticks – a selection of logs and sticks are useful to fill in the gaps in the pallets.
- Scissors and string to bundle the canes / straws.



## Background

First show the children a picture of the completed tower, so that they know what you are trying to achieve and explain why we wish to encourage insects into the garden. At this stage introduce children to the range and types of insects they are encouraging using books, internet searches and pictures. You can also discuss insect lifecycles and food chains.

Then discuss the materials which you have available and describe which insects they support. Canes/straws provide suitable habitats for solitary bees and wasps to live and lay their eggs; rolled up corrugated cardboard provides a suitable habitat for lacewings to do the same.

The cardboard and paper straws also have a secondary purpose, as wasps build their nests out of paper. Straw, bark chippings and logs are an important food source for many woodlice and beetles, and the straw may also be used as a bedding material by birds or other insects. The broken terracotta, slate can be used to create little nooks for insects to live in.

## Building

Place your first pallet in the desired location and encourage the children to fill of all the gaps with a selection of materials. Once this layer is filled move the second pallet into place and continue filling. It doesn't matter if each pallet is not completely full, but it helps if any gaps left can be filled with bark/sticks.

## Tips

- Use the holes in the bricks to hold bundles of canes/straws securely in place.
- Drill holes in any logs you are including in the tower, as this will provide nooks for insects and aid decomposition.



- Try and build a roof, as it should prolong the life of the structure. A length of natural fence screening can be used (available in bamboo, willow, or conifer). Wrap it around a large piece of wood and place on the top of the tower. Weigh down with broken tiles and bricks so that it doesn't blow away.
- As the habitat will be used by a range of classes in the school for mini-beast hunts it is nice if each class can complete a layer. It is also advisable to build the tower during autumn or spring term, so that the insects have a chance to move in before the tower is used for mini-beast hunts in the summer.

## Further work

Mini-beast hunts: once the tower is completed leave for a few months to encourage insects to move in. Then on a nice sunny day get children to sit around the tower and monitor the numbers and species of flying insects that visit the tower.

You can also remove the roof layer and see if any insects are living inside.