

Best practices: 10 easy ways to support biodiversity close to your home

The Garden Charter explains how easy it can be to enable hedgehogs, birds, butterflies and other small animals to thrive in an otherwise well-kept garden. Whoever signs up to the Charter promises to follow a few basic principles, based on the following:

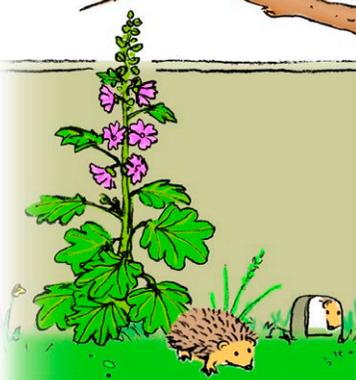
1 • Allow a few corners of your lawn to run wild, they will become natural hotbeds of diversity.



2 • Bushes and hedges: choose local varieties, let them grow and only trim them back when there are no birds' nests in them (September-February).



3 • Place a few heaps of branches, leaves and stones around your garden, they will become a refuge for wildlife.



4 • Agree with your neighbours on a few narrow ground-level openings in the fences so that hedgehogs can move from one garden to another without risking their lives on the road.

5 • Use no artificial herbicides or pesticides. In case of need use only natural products to fight against pests. Methaldehyde granules (against slugs) are to be avoided at all costs.

6 • Lights out: unnecessary outdoor lighting devices disturb small animals in their night-time comings and goings.

7 • Do not plant any exotic invasive species (black list) and try to destroy any that you may find in your garden.

8 • Cats move quietly and can be a real menace for birds and other small animals, so fix a small bell on puss's collar.

9 • Observe the Swiss Federal law on outdoor fires, and avoid moving around dead branches or leaves during the reproductive or hibernation periods.

10 • If you have a swimming pool, design a small ramp so that animals who fall into the water can crawl out again.



www.charte-des-jardins.ch

How do I join the Garden Charter?

Several communities and neighbourhood groups have undertaken to manage the Garden Charter in their respective areas; they collect the signed Charters and distribute the wooden signs with the logo.

However, it is not necessary to wait for a local group to emerge: the Garden Charter is readily available on the web site (URL below). Any person can join by filling out and signing the form on the last page of the Charter. The same form can be used to order an emblem carved out of local pinewood by a workshop for people with special needs.

For those who would rather design an emblem themselves, the logo can be downloaded free of charge.

For further information on good practices in gardening (in French and German), simply click on the Garden gate in front of the house on energie-environnement.ch* and an interactive information system will help you open up your garden to the local fauna and flora. 🐛

* This service is brought to you with the support of the Environment and Energy Departments of the Cantons of Berne, Fribourg, Jura, Geneva, Neuchâtel, Valais and Vaud



Information

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energie-environnement.ch, plateforme d'information des services cantonaux de l'énergie et de l'environnement - 10.2023



Biodiversity – the ethical choice

Whether you live in a house or a multi-storey building you may opt for the Garden Charter in order to promote Biodiversity in your surroundings. The Charter is based on 10 good practice principles in favour of indigenous fauna and flora, applied to what you plant species you choose to use, how and how often you mow or trim them, and generally how you manage your piece of land, whatever its size.

There is no certifying mechanism: it is a promise rather than a label. Whoever signs up undergoes a **moral** undertaking to respect the good practices set out in the Charter. Each participant is encouraged to place the emblem in a prominent position, for all to see!



Why the Garden Charter?

Species are disappearing everywhere, not only in the tropics. Also in Europe, wildlife-friendly habitats are becoming increasingly rare, as urbanisation encroaches on the undeveloped land that used to subsist around the edges of built-up areas. Many of the older, larger tenancies are being carved up into smaller holdings. Mature gardens with tall trees and stable soil profiles are being replaced by tiny patches of grass, often surrounded by impenetrable barriers. In the process, the ancient hedges and stone walls which were a refuge for generations of wild animals and plants are lost.

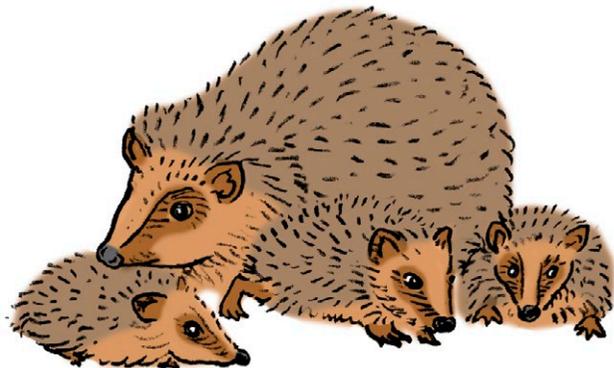
All too often, these new gardens are artificial to the extreme, with prim lawns (thanks to selective herbicides), decorative plants with no relation to the local flora, and



single-species hedges chosen for their ability to block out the view of the neighbours rather than any biological function such as providing nesting space or fruit and seeds for butterflies, birds and other small animals. Any stick or twig found on the ground is immediately removed before it can be picked up

by a nest-building bird, and all-night lighting is provided to survey the result.

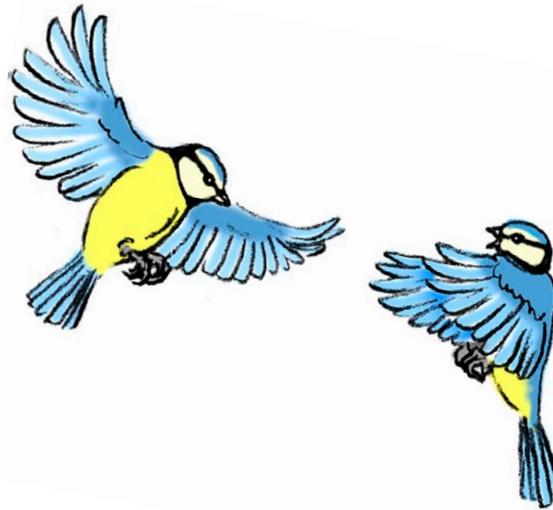
The consequence can only be that birds and other small animals will have literally nowhere to hide, as well as no food and no material for nest-building – and not even peace at night, because of the lights. 🐸



The Garden Charter: 7 pages of common sense

The Garden Charter is a 7-page document distributed by local communities (*communes/Gemeinden*) and also by local civil society organisations – see right. It is also available via the Internet. The Charter explains how and why 10 good practice principles can help promote nature and biodiversity in any garden. On the last page, a form can be filled out and signed by whoever wishes to join. The document is available in English, French, German and Italian.

The Charter is not a legal document, nor does it grant any rights to its holder. Signing up is an ethical decision, which the signer may then publicise by affixing the wooden logo on their wall or fence.



Join or create a network

The survival of squirrels, birds and other small wildlife often hinges on the size of their respective territories. A small garden, however friendly, is simply not big enough for many species. So it is important to create a network, with small passages allowing hedgehogs and other small animals to move from one garden to the next, without having to risk their lives on the road. This is the main reason why the Garden Charter tends to be developed at the neighbourhood or local community level.

However, if no organisation has started using the Charter in your area, it is of course possible to sign up at the individual level (perhaps with the ambition of building up a local network in the future!)

The best way to meet neighbours

Whether the Garden Charter is managed by the municipal authorities or by a more informal group, it is an excellent way of getting to know one's neighbours. Indeed, a favoured approach is to set up regular meetings so that participants can exchange information, discuss what plants to sow, decide where shelter and nest-building material should be positioned, etc.

All the necessary documents are available on the chartes-jardins.ch web site. As well as the Charter itself (in several languages), you will find suggestions, logos, labels, and information on how to order the emblem directly from the sheltered workshop which makes them. 🐸

All gardens are welcome

The Garden Charter may be used on any piece of land, no matter its size, age or function. Private gardens are one possibility, but any green area may apply, including spaces surrounding multi-storey buildings, office blocks or schools, or even rooftops!

Even if you have no more than a thin lawn dotted with rhododendrons and surrounded by a laurel hedge, such a species-poor setting may yet be improved by phasing out the use of chemicals, mowing less close to the ground, making a hedgehog-friendly hole in the fence, decommissioning any outdoor lights, and opting for local species whenever a plant needs to be replaced. 🐸