



Private Gardens



Aims of the Private Gardens Action Plan

- To highlight and protect the resource for wildlife provided by private gardens in Lambeth.
- To improve private gardens in Lambeth as habitat for a range of wildlife species.
- To encourage a greater awareness of biodiversity in private gardens and minimise practices or techniques which adversely impact upon wild habitats and species.

A) Why are private gardens important for biodiversity?

Private gardens are defined as ‘private open space surrounding residential dwellings where householders have sole responsibility for management’. Private gardens form an important part of the landscape of Lambeth providing places for frequent contact with nature. Private gardens are some of the most varied areas of green space in London, and range in size from tiny ‘pocket handkerchief’ backyards to elaborate landscaped parkland in leafy suburbs.

Garden ponds support amphibians and dragonflies, and dense undergrowth provides breeding sites for birds, many of which have suffered significant declines in the wider countryside. Hedgehogs, bats, butterflies are frequently associated with gardens. Larger gardens and gardens adjoining areas of semi-natural habitat, can help support grass snakes, badgers and birds such as woodpeckers.

B) Are there many private gardens in Lambeth?

The distribution of private gardens in Lambeth is mixed with most in the south-central half of the Borough, e.g. Streatham, Norwood, Clapham and Herne Hill. There are also many private gardens across the northern half of the Borough (Brixton, Stockwell, Camberwell, Kennington, Vauxhall and Waterloo), but the abundance of high-density social housing is a limiting factor.

The London ‘rule of thumb’ infers about 20% of Lambeth is covered with private gardens, which equates to 550 ha of land which can be designated as ‘private garden’. Private gardens vary across Lambeth as to size, shape, management and suitability for wildlife. Some private gardens are very large and some are communal, servicing private developments where residents don’t have their own individual gardens. Some are small, but depending on how they are used and managed, make a significant contribution to local biodiversity.

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for Lambeth's private gardens?

Style of management has a profound effect on wildlife associated with private gardens. An intensively managed garden will support far fewer wild species than a garden which contains a range of habitats like shrubs, climbers, long grass, a pond and dead wood. The pressure to keep garden maintenance simple and cost-effective is a major issue.

The way a garden is planted has a major impact on the wildlife it supports. Some plants certainly improve a garden's wildlife value, but other garden plants have comparatively little value for wildlife, for example cultivated varieties which produce little or no nectar.

Excessive use of pesticides is thought to be a major cause of the decline of certain species, especially many garden birds and hedgehogs. Pesticides may also have more direct effects, for example insecticides kill insects beneficial to gardens as well as target species whose destruction is desired by gardeners. Although organic gardening is becoming popular, along with more environmentally friendly pest control methods, the desire for 'quick fix' solutions tends to limit choices of pest control methods for most gardeners.

The size of a garden and its connections with adjacent land, which can act as a 'pool' for new species colonisation, is a major factor influencing the wildlife that will use it.

New targets for housing in London have and are still driving demand for putting new buildings in older gardens. In addition there has been a reduction in the size of gardens in new developments, as developers 'cram in' as many residential units as they can – this limits how much land is given over to garden space.

Some unscrupulous gardeners or garden centres assume the best way to get 'wildlife in a garden' is to take it from the wild: many wild plants and animals are still being removed from the countryside. Such people fail to appreciate that wild plants rarely thrive in maintained gardens, and may even introduce many pests or diseases, which are then hard to manage or eradicate.

D) What is the legal status of Lambeth's private gardens?

Private gardens or estates are rarely protected from development purely on the basis of resident biodiversity; nevertheless, it is often a significant factor included in planning policies to protect garden land, e.g. Conservation Area status and Tree Preservation Orders. Many of Lambeth's best wildlife gardens are in Conservation Areas or in locations which have formal Tree Preservation Orders attached to them.

Many animals using private gardens are protected by current wildlife legislation: any attempts to intentionally kill such protected species or disturb nesting or breeding sites could render a gardener liable to prosecution. Examples include bats, slow worms, great crested newts and common lizards.

E) What will the Private Gardens Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will assess the biodiversity status of private gardens in Lambeth, and bring together and compile baseline information by 2006 to achieve this.

Objective 2. We will raise the profile and public awareness of wildlife gardening in Lambeth, and promote cost-effective alternatives to the use of pesticides and other wildlife-unfriendly practices. To help achieve this, we will publish a wildlife gardening guide or 'toolkit' by 2006, and aim to launch a 'Best Wildlife Garden' award for Lambeth by 2007.

F) Who is involved in the Private Gardens Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Private Gardens Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Partners include Lambeth Planning

The Lead Community Partner would be the Lambeth Horticultural Society (LHS), which represents gardeners and residents across the Boroughs with an interest in horticulture. Other Partners include the Museum of Garden History, Greater London Authority, London Wildlife Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the London Natural History Society.

2. Contact for information

For more information on the Lambeth Private Gardens Action Plan, including copies of this plan in paper or electronic format, please contact:

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3. Further information and advice

Further advice on private gardens, and their management and protection for nature conservation and biodiversity, can be found on the following websites.

- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/index.htm>)
- English Nature (<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/>)
- RSPB Gardens Site (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/gardens/>)
- BBC – Wildlife Gardening Information Web Pages (http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics/techniques/organic_wildgardens.shtml)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)
- London Wildlife Trust – Gardening for Wildlife (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/resources2.php?MemberID=&SelSubjectID=7>)
- London Wildlife Trust Centre for Wildlife Gardening (http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/reserve.php?reserve_id=73)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/londonissues/>)
- Royal Horticultural Society Wildlife Gardening (<http://www.rhs.org.uk/research/biodiversity/index.asp>)
- “Wild About Gardens” (<http://www.wildaboutgardens.org/>)
- Natural History Museum Wildlife Garden (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/museum/garden/>)
- Gardening Which? Biodiversity Information Campaign (<http://www.which.net/gardeningwhich/campaigns/biodiversity.html>)
- British Trust for Ornithology Garden Birdwatch (<http://www.bto.org/gbw/index.htm>)
- Museum of Garden History (<http://www.cix.co.uk/~museumgh/>)
- Lambeth Palace – Information on the Palace Gardens (<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/palace/detail.html>)

