

Gardening for Water and Wildlife: our top water-wise tips

Around the garden

Water Wisely

- Plants 'drink' from their roots, so it's best to water around the base of plants for most efficient use of water
- Water early morning or late afternoon/evening to reduce evaporation
- Water less frequently but more thoroughly

Find out more here: [RHS - Watering - Getting it Right](#)

The Benefits of Butts

Using a water butt to catch rain is a great way to store water for use during a dry spell, and when heavy rain is expected the tap can be left open to 'slow the flow' of stormwater into the drainage system. You can find lots of advice on how and where to site them here: [RHS - Water collecting](#)

The Magic of Mulch

Applying a mulch to your beds (home-made garden compost, leaf mould or wood chippings) will help to:

- reduce evaporation and keep moisture in the soil
- suppress weeds and deter some pests
- protect soil and roots from extremes of temperature
- improve the fertility and structure of the soil

Want to know more? [RHS - Mulches and Mulching](#)

Please don't chuck your clippings in the River ...

... hoey them on the heap! Creating home-made compost is a great way to improve the quality of your soil – and if you live near the river don't forget to site your compost heap well away from the bank to prevent nutrients leaking into the river and affecting water quality. There's lots of advice online - try: [Gardeners World - How to make compost](#)

Hidden Corners ...

Keep Septic Tanks Safe

Look after your septic tank to prevent sewage leakage:

- tanks should be emptied regularly by a licensed contractor - once a year as a rule of thumb
- the waste is broken down by bacteria which can be affected by chemicals in everyday products so be careful what goes down your drains - use bleach in moderation and you'll need to use phosphate-free cleaners and detergents.

Find out more: [Call of Nature - Septic Tank Etiquette](#)

.... and Don't Miss a Mis-connection

Plumbing and drainage mis-connections can lead to untreated sewage escaping and polluting waterways – if your house was built or extended after the 1920s, or if there have been any alterations to the drainage, it might have separate systems for waste water and surface water – and a misconnection might result in waste water entering local rivers. Check out this link if you want to know more: [ConnectRight - How to check for misconnections](#)

And if you'd like to do even more?

Brilliant Bogs

If you have a patch that is permanently damp, try making a bog garden with plants such as Creeping Jenny, Marsh Marigolds and Water Forget-Me-Nots. Find out how: [Wildlife Trusts - Make a Bog Garden](#)

Marvellous Mud

If there's an area where storm water gathers after heavy rain, perhaps running off a shed or garage roof, you could create a 'rain garden' with plants such as Bugle and Yellow Flag Iris that can cope with being waterlogged occasionally. Find out more here: [RHS - Rain Gardens](#)

In Praise of Ponds

If you have a larger area with more sustained run-off, you could think about making a rain-fed wildlife pond: [RHS - Wildlife Pond Step by Step](#) And of course a pond anywhere will help to slow the flow and filter out pollutants before they reach the river, as well as attracting wildlife to your garden: [Dorset Wildlife Trust - How to Build a Pond](#)

Rewild a Roof

If you're feeling ambitious, planting a 'green roof' - perhaps on a log store or shed for starters! – will not only hold and slow the flow of rainwater but will also provide extra habitat for wildlife: [RHS - Green Roofs](#)

Tales of the Riverbank

If you're lucky enough to have a riverside garden, how you look after it can have a big impact on the river.

- If you're clearing grassy vegetation on the bank, don't cut it back too much – leaving it 10-15cm high will help to hold the bank together, reducing erosion and providing much-needed habitat for water voles.
- Are there too many trees casting shade over the water? 60% open, 40% shade is a good balance. Coppicing overhanging river bank trees will allow more light to get to the river - always coppice in the winter when trees are dormant, birds are not nesting and bat colonies are less likely to be present – if it's a big job, get help!
- And let us know if you spot any invasive species like Himalayan balsam – we might be able to arrange a summer work party to help clear it.

More?!

You can find lots more ideas for water and wildlife friendly gardening here: [The Wildlife Trusts - Help Wildlife at Home](#)

Dorset Wild Rivers is a partnership of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest. We are supporting communities to better look after their water environment. We are doing this with the support of the Dorset Catchment Based Approach, Environment Agency and Wessex Water.

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