

# Creating Areas for Nature

## 6.1 Saving water

### 6. Water and waste



Season-  
All

#### Why?

We can't live without it, and it's a dwindling resource: water is vital for life on the planet. Here in south-east England we have less water per person available than other parts of England because of our low levels of rainfall and high population density. Water saving should be an every day part of our lives, and there are many ways in which you can use your nature area to help.

#### Helpful tips

- **Water butts** are a simple and effective way to save water. Not only will they reduce your water consumption but they allow you to use rainwater to fill your pond or water your plants. Rainwater is far preferable to tap water as it contains no chemicals such as chlorine. A water butt can be bought from a variety of sources, including most garden centres. One water butt can hold anything from a hundred to over one thousand litres of water. It is a good idea to site the water butts close to where the water will be needed; for example, close to a pond that will need filling or next to your raised beds. Ideally, connect the water butts to your drainpipes so that they can collect all of the rainwater that flows from them. Make sure that the stand for the water butt remains firm in the ground and does not wobble. If it does then move the stand to firmer ground or place something with a hard, flat surface underneath to support it.
- If you need a water butt in an area where there is no gutter or drainpipe available, you could consider building a **water harvester** (see picture) using the following method:

Attach a large plywood board to three lengths of timber and secure into the ground.

Angle the board so that it leans heavily down towards one point of the board. Then place a water butt underneath this point and attach two small pieces of timber to the surface of the plywood on two edges.

Your board can be shaped into any design you wish, such as leaves (see bottom picture).



- Increase areas of shade in your nature area by putting in a **pergola** or **willow structure**.
- **Raised beds** with liners included hold in water better than those at ground level, thus reducing the amount of water required to keep their plants healthy.
- Place **mulch** at the base of your plants to reduce water evaporation from the soil. Added benefits are that mulch reduces weed growth and enriches the soil. Use your compost as an ideal mulch.
- Use **drought-tolerant plants** as another way of reducing the amount and frequency of watering necessary in your area.
- **Timing your watering** can have a huge effect on water usage. Water your plants early in the morning and late in the evening to minimise evaporation. Also bear in mind that plants use significantly less water in winter than in summer, thus watering of them should also be decreased.
- **Is it really necessary to water** everything in your nature area? Bear in mind that well-established hedges and trees will generally not need to be watered at all.



For details and advice on which species of plants to use, and where to source local materials and contractors, contact your local Countryside Management Partnership.

# Creating Areas for Nature

## 6.2 Composting

### 6. Water and waste



#### Why?

Compost can be put to many different uses in a wildlife area. When you are planting any new flowers or plants, incorporate the compost to improve the quality of the soil and encourage earthworms and other beneficial organisms that break down soil and release nutrients for plant life. Compost also makes an excellent mulch (material that you spread over the top of your soil to keep in the moisture and reduce growth of weeds) for plants, trees, hedges, climbers and anything else that you are growing in the area. You should recycle as much as possible on the compost pile; for example, you can put kitchen scraps, grass cuttings, plant cuttings and other green rubbish on it which will rot down over time and form compost.

#### Some ideas for composting

- If you do not want to make or buy an actual compost bin, you can easily create a compost area simply by choosing a site and starting from there. Try to site the compost where there aren't too many people (it may smell a bit, and needs to be left undisturbed), but where it can be easily accessed and used no matter how soggy the ground gets! It should not be close to any ponds or other water sources because of the danger of nutrients from the compost leaching into the water. It is also a good idea to separate the pile from your area for nature, either by placing it at some distance or by erecting a small fence. This will prevent any weeds that have been thrown on the pile from encroaching on the wildlife area.
- A cheap and simple way of creating a compost bin is to use 4 wooden pallets; ask around local businesses and you should be able to get some for free. Lay one pallet flat—this will be the base. Using wire, nails, plastic ties or anything else you have to hand, connect the other 3 pallets to form a back and 2 sides (see bottom right).
- If you're feeling a bit more creative, use lengths of timber to build a box-shaped compost bin. Take care not to use pressure-treated wood, though, as this contains harmful levels of copper and chromium.
- A wormery is basically a container (wooden or plastic) that contains composting worms. The worms live on the organic waste you put in and break it down to produce a nutrient-rich compost. A huge range of different models is available from various companies, and adds an extra dimension to composting which children in particular can find fascinating.



### Tips for maintaining compost

- Remember that the key ingredients for successful compost are air, moisture and heat.
- To ensure a sufficient supply of air to the compost, make sure that your compost bin has holes on the sides. You should also turn it once a week, using a gardening fork.
- Composting things with a range of textures (that is, some coarse material and some fine) will help to aerate the compost.
- Moisture will be retained if you are using a bin to store your compost. Otherwise, try to site the compost pile in dappled sunlight/ shadow, which will provide enough heat without letting the pile dry out.
- If the compost dries out you can water it. Just make sure that the water can drain away and does not lie in a pool at the bottom.
- It is worth bearing in mind that the larger the compost heap, the more heat it will generate and retain. Small amounts of compost will stay warmer in a bin.
- Be aware that the larger the material, the longer it will take to compost. It is likely to be at least six months before your compost is ready to use; it should be brown and crumbly by the end of the process.
- Avoid adding any meat, excrement or body fluids (no nappies!) as these will attract animals and produce an unpleasant smell. Vegetable peelings, grass cuttings, crushed egg shells, coffee grounds, shredded paper etc. are all fine.



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