



# Wildlife Gardening: wildlife on walls

A surprising number of animals and plants use these steep environments, especially those that would originally be associated with cliffs and tall trees. Look for kestrels on high buildings, house martins nesting in Central London, and even pied wagtails roosting on the Holloway Road.

Wildlife on walls around your own home might include swifts and swallows nesting under the eaves, pipistrelle bats that may roost overnight under a windowsill in summer, and peacock butterflies warming up on a sunny wall in February. Watch for hunting spiders along the base of walls and robins nesting in your hanging baskets.

If you have a garden, greening your walls will benefit local wildlife, providing nesting space and cover for birds and insects, as well as extra nectar for butterflies.

If you do not have a garden, then your greener walls and balcony may provide vital links between local green space for butterflies and birds.

If you are in a block of flats, try to persuade your neighbours to green their balconies at the same time as yours, then you will provide a more worthwhile resource for hungry blackbirds, bumble bees, and butterflies, as well as a spectacular show to passers by.

## Climbing ideas for different conditions

### North-facing walls

- Ivy - a supreme wildlife plant associated with 230 species of animal. Evergreen cover for nesting birds, and late nectar for hungry butterflies
- Honeysuckle - nectar for butterflies and moths, and berries for birds
- Traveller's Joy - charming fluffy 'old man's beard' seeds in autumn, and a mass of stems for birds to hide in

### East facing Walls

- Climbing roses - a safe thicket for nesting blackbirds
- Hydrangea petiolaris - nectar for butterflies, shelter for birds and bats
- Hop - soothing to you, cover for birds, and leafy food for the caterpillar of the comma butterfly

### South facing Walls

- Wisteria - nectar rich flowers and strong stems for summer nesting birds - give it lots of moist soil
- Grape vine - fruit for butterflies, moths and birds
- Figs - these and other fruits can be trained, and shared with the birds
- Blank walls - for hunting spiders, and basking butterflies enjoying the heat

### West facing walls

- Clematis armandii - early nectar for early bees, and evergreen cover for spring nesting birds. Give it some space and it will reward you with fragrance
- Star jasmine - Another evergreen giving shelter to roosting and nesting birds. Give it lots of water during the growing season
- Passion flower - amazing flowers, nectar and fruit, needs thin wires for the spiralling tendrils to cling to
- Pyrocantha - choose an erect red-berried variety like P. coccinea 'Lalandei' for fruit and dense cover

Always plant climbers and shrubs at least 30cm from the wall, to make sure that they get enough rainwater.

Fix horizontal supports to your wall and vertical wires, then birds can use the ledges to nest on.

Climbers will protect rather than damage your walls, but do make sure that they don't get behind gutters and drainpipes, as they may push these off. Trim your climbers back like a hedge when they get too big.

## Save our Sparrows

Sparrows are declining in London. Nobody has a complete answer on why numbers of these cheeky birds have dropped by as much as 90% in some areas, and we are all working to try to understand more. With some basic carpentry skills you can contribute to the local well-being of these birds by offering a nesting site on one of your walls.

**Your nesting box should be made from untreated wood** - at least 15mm thick, with no gaps for the wind to whistle through including a lid which is fastened down, and a waterproof strip across the top to keep rain out.

### Your nesting box is best fixed

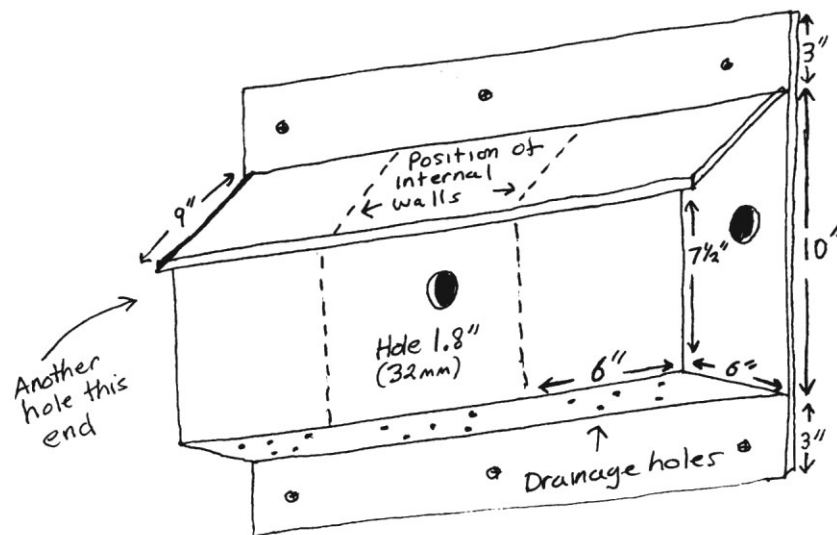
- to a batten which is fixed to the wall, to prevent it from rotting
- at least 2 metres off the ground
- on a wall which is not too hot or too cold
- away from bird feeding areas (birds are territorial)
- somewhere you can watch from a window

### Cleaning

Clean out the old nesting material carefully in late autumn, in order to remove any parasites. Wear gloves and wash well afterwards. Don't be in too much of a hurry... because birds sometimes carry on using a box at night after the young have flown and need the old nest to keep warm. They may rear more than one brood too. Use only hot water for cleaning.

### Pecking order

The following dimensions are for the size of hole needed for specific birds: 25mm for blue tits only, 28mm for great tits to squeeze through, 32mm for sparrows, or larger for starlings.



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Unlike many birds, sparrows are happy to nest communally. Since modern buildings often provide few niches for these birds to take advantage of, you might like to offer this desirable residence, housing three families in separate apartments in one simple block. Sparrows will also nest in single birdhouses.

