



**Cheshire**  
Wildlife Trust

# Create a space for wellbeing

[cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)

## In this guide...

Introduction.....3

The 5 Pathways to Nature  
Connection.....4

Creating a wellbeing space.....5

Mindful activities.....7



## Introduction

Outdoor space is so important, especially in urban environments where so many of us don't have gardens. There are many health benefits to spending time outdoors and connecting to nature.

We know life feels good when we have a strong connection to nature, it can provide meaning, add value and make us appreciate what is at our fingertips. This toolkit is designed to help you make the most of areas in your community that may be considered wasted space, to improve them for wildlife. In doing so, you will provide more space for people to connect to nature and feel better. We will also introduce you to the 5 Pathways to Nature Connection which provide some inspiration and guidance on how you can become closer to nature.



“Spending time in green space or bringing nature into your everyday life can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing. For example, doing things like growing food or flowers, exercising outdoors or being around animals can have lots of positive effects.” - **Mind, the mental health charity**

# The 5 Pathways to Nature Connection

This is an evidence based approach developed by the University of Derby. Being connected to nature improves health, wellbeing and inspires people to take more action for nature.

## 1. Contact

Explore, take a closer look and get in touch with the natural world. Engage with nature through the senses for pleasure e.g. listening to birdsong, smelling wildflowers or watching the sunset. Have specific places which enable people to really experience the nature around them. Put up signs to encourage people to stop and listen, or explore the bark of trees. Have paths through the site to encourage visitors.



## 2. Beauty

Take time to appreciate the beauty of Mother Nature. Engage with the aesthetic qualities e.g. appreciating natural scenery or connecting through the arts. This is about experiencing the wow factor of nature. Place seating near things people can appreciate. Tell people more about the place and how amazing it really is.

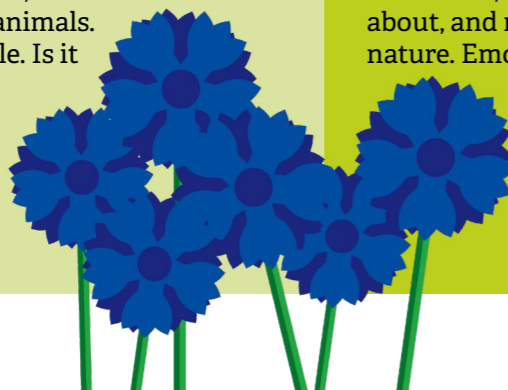
## 3. Compassion

Think about what you could do for nature. Be aware of how your actions affect nature. Make decisions that help nature and wildlife. Whether that is choosing the more environmentally friendly option when you buy things, or having plants that bees like.



## 4. Meaning

Consider what nature means to you. Think about the meaning and signs of nature, the season changes and the life cycles of animals. Make the space useful to people. Is it somewhere people go to relax, to meet people, or learn in.



## 5. Emotion

Find happiness and wonder. Find an emotional bond with, and love, for nature e.g. talking about, and reflecting on your feelings about nature. Emotions are very natural, let nature be somewhere to support emotional wellbeing. Make your wasted space an exciting place to be to inspire a reaction.

# Creating a wellbeing space

Make your space suitable for wellbeing. All spaces are different and offer unique challenges and opportunities. Some of the suggestions below may not work for your space and there may be other things you'd like to try instead. Remember that wherever your location, whether it's obvious or not, the site will belong to somebody so permission will be required to make any changes to the space. For more information on finding out who owns the space have a look at our Wasted Space guide.

## A safe space

Once you have the relevant permissions from the owner, you need to make sure it is a safe place to be. Clearing any litter as well as broken glass, rubble or other things that might cause an injury is a good place to start. This might need to be done regularly. Once the community sees people are caring for the space, evidence shows they start to take pride in it too and litter can reduce.



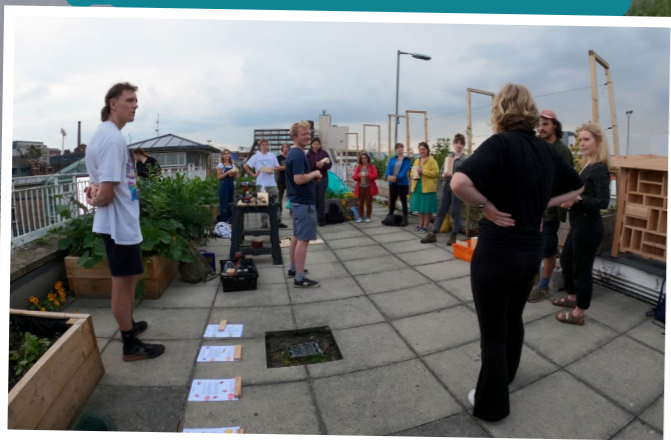
## Seating

If the space is big enough, it might be an idea to create a seating area where people can choose to spend time just connecting with nature. Benches don't have to cost a lot, logs and log slices make great seats. Pallets can often be sourced for free and hosting a day to upcycle them into furniture can get the community invested in the space. For more hints and tips take a look at our upcycling guide.

## Consider others

Be aware of how other people want to use the space and what is planned to make it more friendly for wildlife, especially if it isn't very big. It might be a good idea for everyone who plans to use the space to sit down to chat, or even form a committee. It is really important that everyone can work together to make the space as good as it can be for both wildlife and people without upsetting each other.

Don't forget to share the space. As you start transforming your wasted space other people will notice and might show an interest or ask questions. Make sure you talk about what is happening, put signs up, explain how the changes will benefit wildlife and how the space can be used by the local community, other people might have ideas you haven't thought of.



## Shelter

In order to enjoy the space throughout the year, some shelter would be useful. This doesn't need to involve buying or even making a shelter if you don't have the space or resources. Consider natural forms of shelter, are there any large trees can that provide shade from the sun? Is there a corner of the space that is sheltered from the breeze by walls or buildings?

## Mindful activities that you can do in your space

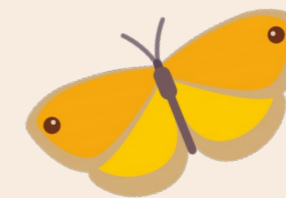


## Take inspiration from nature

Putting pen, pencil or paint to paper can help to distract you from negative thoughts and anxious feelings. You don't have to create a masterpiece, simply enjoy the process of slowing down, being creative and losing yourself in something where the outcome isn't important.

You can grab some paper and a pencil and head into your space, draw the first thing that catches your eye. If drawing isn't your thing, then why not walk around the space and take some photographs. You don't need a fancy camera, your phone is enough. Think outside the box to find beauty; insects and plants make wonderful subjects for photographs. An added bonus to this is that you'll be able to look at the photographs whenever you want to, great on rainy days when you're stuck inside.

Another idea is to write about the space. Nature can be inspiring, wild moments can spark emotions and make you feel a certain way. In order to remember these feelings, recording them in a journal is a good idea. You don't have to write for anyone else, write for fun as a way of connecting with nature and remembering a special experience. Take it a day at a time and get as creative as you like. We have created a wellbeing journal that you can [download](#) to get started.





## Grow something

Caring for and nurturing plants can give you a sense of purpose. Planting is so great for our wellbeing that some researchers have used horticultural therapy with people suffering from depression, anxiety and dementia.

What you can plant will depend on your space. If space is an issue or the ground is hard, sowing perennial wildflower seeds in pots and planters might work really well, and will support the full life cycle of insects. Another great option is to plant food. Herbs grow really well in small pots and lots of different vegetables can be grown quite easily in small spaces. Creating signs inviting people to pick what they want would also benefit the local community.

## Go for a walk or create a sit spot

Take the time to explore the space, walk around it, look at it and take a minute to really see. Often nature can be found, even if at first it appears like it's missing. Can you see moss growing on walls, or 'weeds' peeking through gaps? Maybe insects have already made their home here.

Listen to the sounds you hear. Sometimes closing your eyes can help you really tune in to the small sounds. Your first walk is also a 'baseline', you can repeat this as you make changes to the space and you'll be able to see how it transforms. Download our [mindful walk cards](#), from our website, you can even print them off and leave them somewhere for people to borrow and use as they visit the site.



## Make something

Does your space have places where wildlife can make its home? If not, then there are lots of great ways to create habitat. The physical act of making something can give you a focus and a chance to learn new skills. It doesn't have to be strenuous, or expensive and it can be something you do alone or in a group. Here are some ideas but don't be limited, there are lots more ideas on our [website](#). Go wild!

### How to make your own bird feeder



**What you need:**

- dry ingredients
  - bird seed
  - cooked rice
  - grated cheese
  - dried fruit
  - breadcrumbs
  - chopped nuts
- hard cooking fat (lard or suet)
- a pine cone, coconut shell or yoghurt pot
- string

Use an old yoghurt pot for this, and always recycle after it's been used.

- Mix all the dry ingredients together in a bowl.
- Add the fat and give it a good mix around.
- Choose your feeder. Plaster all over a pine cone or put it round the inside of a coconut shell. Press into a yoghurt pot. You can hang this upside down like a bell or turn it out like a cake.
- Hang your feeders with string (you may need to make holes and tie the string in before adding the mix).

Hang your feeder where you can watch birds without disturbing them.

If you need to melt the fat, ask an adult to help.

[www.wildlifewatch.org.uk](http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk)

### Make a deluxe hedgehog house



**You will need**

- 20mm FSC plywood boards cut to the sizes shown
- Hammer and nails
- 2 metal hinges
- Soil
- Dry leaves
- Pet straw
- Polythene sheeting

Birch is ideal

- Construct the hedgehog house from the following diagram and dimensions.
- Put the pet straw inside, cover the house with polythene sheeting, then pack soil and dead leaves around the outside.

Do not creosote or treat the wood.

Make sure the entrance tunnel faces south, and is kept clear at all times.

The roof is hinged so you can clean the box in future.

raised up on feet

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## Get creative

Creating nature-based art can be a fantastic way to really connect to a space. You can explore what is on the site and see what you can create. You could do some nature weaving with things that inspire beauty. You could create a mandala either on the site or at home with things that you collect. Be careful only to use things either fallen or in abundance. You could even make something artistic more permanent on the space to inspire people to really experience the beauty. Get a local artist or school group down to the site to see what they can create.



## Tidy up

Litter picking has so many benefits. It is a great form of exercise and can leave you with a strong sense of achievement, and feelings of purpose when you're finished. It can also have a big impact on the space you clear, it will look better and be safer for both people and wildlife. You need to make sure you're careful when litter picking though, always use a litter picker and wear gloves. Some councils offer litter pickers for free, check their website to see if yours is offering them.




Have you been inspired to do something for nature? Inspire others by sharing your story on social media and add it to our interactive map of local people like you taking action to bring wildlife back.

### Some useful resources

- [Thriving With Nature \(mentalhealth.org.uk\)](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)
- [5 ways to connect to nature to help our wellbeing | WWF](#)
- [Wellbeing with Nature | pathways to wellbeing through nature connection](#)
- [5 ways to be closer to nature - May - University of Derby](#)
- [Five pathways to nature connectedness | Scouts](#)
- [NatureMe-Booklet-2021.pdf \(derby.ac.uk\)](#)
- [Actions | Cheshire Wildlife Trust](#)

For more free guides, videos and activity packs please visit the toolkit page on our website.



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