

Tiggywinkles Fact Sheets

Garden Hazards Affecting Hedgehogs

Gardens are nature reserves. And, following this line of thinking, every city and town has acres and acres of prime conservation land within it, and everybody who has a garden is a warden. But like the countryside, the garden offers danger as well as food and shelter for its inhabitants, and it is every garden warden's job to minimise those dangers.

Although most of the advice in this fact sheet is written with the hedgehog in mind, it can be applied to almost any of our wildlife visitors. And don't forget about other types of 'garden' - wasteland, railway embankments and cemeteries.

If there aren't any hedgehogs in your area, ask yourself why. It may be that there is a badger sett around, in which case you won't see hedgehogs because badgers eat them! If there is no sett.

Check that your neighbours don't use a lot of pesticides or insecticides. Leave out food regularly and hopefully you will tempt them. Hedgehogs come out naturally during the night, so you won't see them during the day unless they are sick or injured, and of course during the winter you probably won't see any prickly visitors, because they are hibernating.

A-Z of Garden Hazards

The first thing to do is walk around your garden and have a good look at it. Make a mental note of all the cosy, dry sheltered places where a hedgehog might like to nest in future and try to leave those places alone. And if there aren't any places like this in your garden, leave a small corner to get overgrown and make it a wildlife sanctuary.

Now look for hedgehog hazards. What are the things a hedgehog can get caught up in, stuck in or injured by? Think Hedgehog. Below are some of the most common hazards faced by hedgehogs:

Barbed Wire: Keep all barbed wire at least 30cm above the ground, and never leave it trailing or discarded on the ground. If a hedgehog manages to become impaled on a spike, it will curl into a ball instinctively and become enmeshed.

Bonfires: Piles of dry leaves, rolled up newspapers, twigs and wood are irresistible to hedgehogs looking for a nest or some dry shelter, so always check bonfires by carefully turning them over before you set them alight.

Compost Heaps: These are ideal nest sites for hedgehogs which are often injured when the compost is forked or turned. Break the heap down carefully and if you find a nest of hedgehogs (or any other animal), leave them alone. They will move of their own accord.

Drains: Uncovered drains are a common cause of danger, especially the small waste traps outside many kitchens. So cover all drains and if you find a hedgehog well and truly trapped in a drain, pull it out by clamping two pairs of pliers onto its spines and lifting gently.

Fleas: Not strictly a garden hazard, but many people feel that their pets or themselves are at risk from catching hedgehogs fleas and so de-flea hedgehogs. Actually, hedgehog fleas are host specific and fussy eaters, they will not go onto cats or dogs. Don't bother to treat your visitor, you will do him more harm than good.

Food: It is fine to supplement the hedgehog's natural diet of snails and slugs with tinned dog or non-fishy cat food, plus a bowl of water. Milk and bread are very bad for hedgehogs and should never be offered as they will make your visitor ill.

Fungicides: *(see Wood Preserver)*

Garages: If there is a pit or tray of old sump oil, a hedgehog is likely to fall into it. They are also likely to investigate open tins of paint or other liquids so always replace the lids. If a hedgehog does get covered in oil, paint or tar, take it to your local wildlife rescue centre.

Herbicides: *(see Pesticides and Weedkiller)*

Hypothermia: Hedgehogs out during the day are in trouble, and if it is a cold day may be lying apparently lifeless and cold. Bring the hedgehog indoors, place it on a towel-wrapped hot water bottle in a cardboard box. When it is brighter, offer some dog food and water. If the hedgehog does not respond, contact us on 01844 292 292 for advice or take it to your local wildlife rescue centre. N.B. Hedgehogs never hibernate outside of a nest.

Lawn Mowers: Sometimes hedgehogs will snuggle down unnoticed into tall grass and can be caught with blades and strimmers, so walk the area to be mowed in order to check for small animals and nests before beginning work on the lawn.

Netting: This can act as a snare as the twine gets caught around the hedgehog's spines. As it struggles to escape, the strands form ligatures around the poor hedgehog, and these ligatures can act as a tourniquet around limbs. Keep all netting and string arrangements 30cm above the ground and never leave it lying around.

Oil & Paint: *(see Garages)*

Orphans: It is not unusual, in the summer months, to come across a nest of baby hedgehogs with or without their mother. If touched or disturbed the mother hedgehog is likely to eat or desert them, so don't touch. If the mother has definitely been killed the babies will need to be hand reared. This is a very specialised job and should only be undertaken by experienced personnel, phone us for advice.

Pesticides: Many of these contain deadly poisons - slug pellets, for instance, will kill hedgehogs and birds. Organic methods are much safer. Soapy water is good for spraying aphids and other insects and there is a wide selection of safer insect killers on the market. Read the packet carefully and always mix according to the instructions. Or why not try natural repellents like marigolds or peppermint plants.

Pets: Apart from badgers, dogs are the only other animals that regularly injure hedgehogs. Keep your dog under control at all times, and if your dog finds something worth barking at in the garden, find out

what it is. Both the hedgehog and dog are likely to get hurt in the conflict.

Ponds: Hedgehogs swim very well, but if they cannot escape from a pool they will become exhausted and drown. By laying a ramp or by gently sloping the banks of your pond you'll ensure the hedgehog's escape. Alternatively a length of chicken wire hung over the edge makes a good escape ladder. (See *also Swimming Pools*)

Rubbish: Hedgehogs are frequently killed by rubbish, so always ensure that your garden is clear of it. Cover dustbins and tie up refuse sacks so that the contents do not blow away. Broken glass and other sharp objects are obvious hazards, however can ring-pulls and tin cans with the lids only partly opened are also killers. Hedgehogs can also get their heads stuck in empty cans, yoghurt pots and other cartons - flatten them before throwing them away. Also hedgehogs love to nest in black plastic sacks - check any open ones before throwing them away.

Sheds: Hedgehogs regularly nest under sheds and outbuildings and are often injured when the shed is demolished or moved, so always check for hedgehogs by lifting the floor carefully. If you find a nest with youngsters, please **Do Not Disturb Them**, but postpone the work for about a month.

Slug Pellets: Never use slug pellets. The poison they contain almost always kills hedgehogs, who will eat the poisoned slugs (as will birds). Use alternative methods such as scattering rose twigs or nettles around the plants you want to protect, or sink a cup of beer in the ground - this attracts and drowns the slugs. Better still, why not just plant an extra row of lettuces in the garden?

String: (see *Netting*)

Swimming Pools: Leave a flat piece of wood about 30cm square floating in the swimming pool. If a hedgehog falls in it can swim to the 'raft' where it can wait for rescue - Check ponds and pools each day. (see *also Ponds*)

Tar: (see *Garages*)

Weedkillers: (see *Pesticides*)

Wood preserver: Many wood preservers are poisonous and will harm hedgehogs as they frequently lick freshly treated fences. Ask for an environmentally safe water-based product from your garden centre.



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