

Left Spaces

Giving nature room to grow



Photo: Olaf Leillinger



Photo: Heiti Paves



Photo: JM de Llobet

WHAT ARE LEFT SPACES?

Left spaces are areas set aside to let native species of living things thrive – from window boxes and balconies through to public parks and unused community spaces, they form mini-ecosystems that provide a home for organisms both large and small. This leaflet will help you create your own left space and join a network of these ecosystems stretching right across Europe.

HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT SPACE?

Despite Europe's population intensity and agriculture, there's a surprising amount of land that could be used to encourage native species: from small private spaces in cities to much larger rural areas, there's a lot of land which is either over-maintained or effectively abandoned. All of it has the potential to provide a home to local species of living things – if we get to work and provide the conditions that nature needs to work its magic.

There are several ways to create a left space, depending on how you want to work. Even if the space is only available for a year the project is still worthwhile:

1. If you have a window box, balcony or private garden, you need to decide how

much space you can dedicate to native species and for how long.

2. If you have access to a shared garden or community space, you'll need to put together a group to set aside your left space. This could be as easy as knocking on your neighbours' doors or talking with friends, or could involve setting up a Facebook or other social media group to get people involved and get the permissions you'll need.

PRIVATE SPACES

We're used to planting up our gardens with exotic species of plants that provide welcome colour and scent, and often ignore native plants. With a huge range of beautiful native plant species however, there's no reason not to turn over at least part of your garden to them. You can decide whether to plant them or wait for them to grow spontaneously – and what's more, these plants will provide essential "ecosystem services" as well as attracting other native wildlife to your garden.

Step 1: Preparing the ground

Decide how much space you want to give to your local biodiverse area. This could be the whole space, or just a corner – every little bit helps. You'll need to remove any non-native



Photo: Christian Fischer

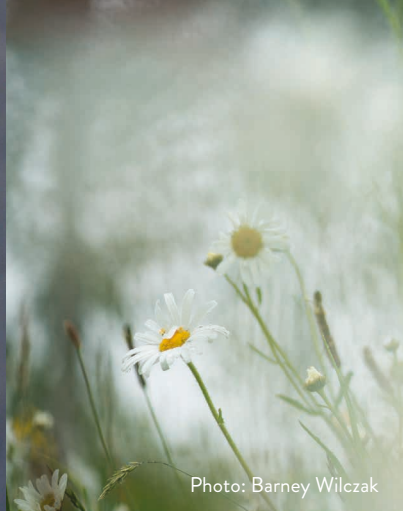


Photo: Barney Wilczak

plants from the space, taking care to remove all the roots from the soil.

Step 2: Letting it grow – or deciding what to plant

You can wait for native plant species to grow wild in your left space or you can sow native seeds. Your local botanic garden offer guidance. They will have hints and tips on how to make your left space suitable for native species and may even stock a range of native species seeds for sale, with descriptions of the best conditions for each plant and its characteristics. For example, as well as offering a splash of colour, some species are known to attract butterflies. For more advice on planting a local biodiversity space, talk to staff at your nearest botanic garden – you can find them through GardenSearch on BGCI's website: www.BGCI.org

Step 3: Enriching the space

You can enrich your left space by installing bird feeders or insect homes for example to make it attractive to other native species such as birds, pollinating insects, small mammals and more. Let It Grow participants have resources on how to do this – check the campaign website to find your nearest Let

It Grow zoo, garden or science centre
www.letitgrow.eu

Step 4: Managing the space

Planting a space for local species isn't just a question of sowing the seeds and sitting back to enjoy the nature that comes into your garden. Due to human activity, there are many invasive species which can make life much harder for local wildlife. Some of these you will probably know, others will be harder to identify, for a more comprehensive guide to invasive plants, go to www.europealiens.org. You can also work together with your neighbours to unite your gardens for biodiversity – often just removing a brick or two from your garden wall will make it easier for small animals to move between gardens, often taking seeds with them as they move.

Step 5: Observe and enjoy!

As your local biodiversity garden grows, you should see a good range of wildlife coming into your garden – look out for everything from fungi to birds. We'd love to see the range of life in your garden, so think about setting up a Facebook group or Instagram page to show-off your photos (see below) – don't forget to like the Let It Grow Facebook page, and we'll follow yours.

PUBLIC SPACES

If you are setting up a left space on public or shared land, the process is the same as for private spaces, but with a few extra steps:

First, select your space! Look out for unused spaces such as a corner of your local park, a flower bed outside your apartment block or even a roundabout at the edge of town. Your community may have many spaces that might seem suitable, but it is important to find out how your community uses a space and how your biodiversity garden might affect this use before going any further.

Once you've located a suitable space, you'll need to get permission from the landowner. In some cases, finding the landowner should be easy – for example, public parks are usually owned by the local authority, and they are generally responsible for other small public spaces. While the ownership of other spaces may be less clear, you should be able to find out who owns the land by asking at your local municipality or council offices. Once you know who the owner is, make a written request to them to use part of their land; we've provided a sample letter on the campaign website www.letitgrow.eu to help you make your argument.

If the landowner gives you permission to use part of their land for local biodiversity, you can involve the whole community in the project. Knocking on your neighbours' doors or setting up a community Facebook page could help get people enthusiastic about the

project. The campaign website also contains a sample leaflet that you can give to your community to persuade them to join you.

You'll also need to draw up an action plan with the community group to help decide who is responsible for the different parts of the project – a sample action plan is also available from the Let It Grow website.

Setting up a Facebook group for your project:

After logging into your Facebook account, you will see on the right hand side of the page a padlock symbol, with a downward facing arrow next to it. Click on the arrow, and it will offer you several options, including "Create a group". Clicking on the "Create a group" option will take you to an options menu, allowing you to name the group, invite friends, and decide how public you want to make your posts. Once you've done this and added some images, you and the other members of the group can upload messages, photos and videos.

You can also use Instagram and Tumblr as ways to store and display photos of your project and the living things that you find there. Just log on to their websites for instructions.

GETTING HELP

If you have a question about your biodiversity garden, please do get in touch with your local BGCI, Ecsite or EAZA member, or write to us at info@letitgrow.eu



¹ Ecosystem services are the services provided to an ecosystem by the organisms that live there. Key services provided by ecosystems are climate regulation, pests control, water and air purification, flood and erosion prevention, crop pollination, fiber and fuel provision, etc