

Hilldrop

4 Acre Wildlife Garden

We were lucky enough to buy this place in 1990. Then it was pretty much mown grass dotted with a few ash/hawthorn and of course the obligatory 60's weeping willow. On a warm south facing slope it was the perfect place for us to mess about with wild plants, waste materials and habitats. We had a 4 acre playground.



Shipping Container Garden Room

We built this garden room by using 2 used 20ft containers; freight containers have been used for many years to create living space but for us their inherent strength to take green roofs and also remain portable really appeals. A 20ft container gives us a box in which we can fit a deep heavy green roof, fix habitat panels and most importantly can be moved in the future. A truly sustainable building is one that can change use and be moved at any time - these buildings can morph and move but never be demolished.

This version is clad in UK Larch and insulated on the outside of the steel mitigating any issues with condensation.

Green Roof Timber House

With our house, we wanted a building that allowed us to grow plants on the roof as well as connecting with the plotlands bungalows this part of Langdon is known for. It's built from UK Douglas Fir timber, has no timber preservatives and was designed to give an incredible sociable and light place to live. We worked with architect Jon Broome and built the place with help from my brother and Dad in 1995.

We love this house and all the amazing people we have shared it with over the years.

Trial Green Roofs

These are a copy of the roofs we put above our cycle shelters. We built them to trial different soils/drainage techniques and plant choice. Great height to see the plants up close.



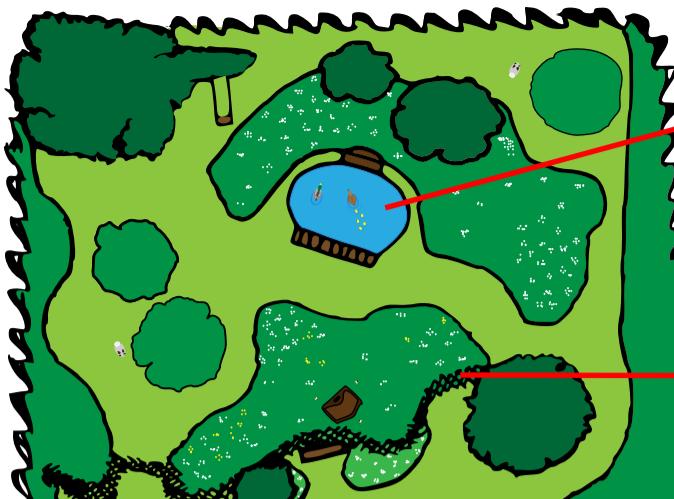
Rubble Planters

Planters - often pretty dull, often made from timber that rots quickly and rarely incorporating waste materials. These are made from a central core of drainage pipe filled with soil and an outer skin of crushed rubble; they will last for 50 years plus, use our waste and provide a niche for bugs; I like these.



Green Roof Bin Shelter

We design and make these shelters as part of our work to get wildlife back into towns and cities. This one happens to hold 6 wheelie bins but we also use a similar design to store bikes. We often trial ideas here in the garden before offering them for sale. Great to force habitat into cities on the back of everyday structures we have to have.



Ponds

We have 3 ponds and a scrape (ephemeral wetland) in the garden. Ponds are the best thing - tiny ponds, ponds that dry out in summer - all are good! The most important thing to get a great wildlife pond is not to introduce nutrients or fish. If you do that you're virtually guaranteed to have a pond that is healthy and full of life. Our bottom pond is simply dug into the heavy clay, unfortunately being at the bottom of the hill it gets a lots of nutrient run off in winter which is not ideal, the brownfield pond on the other hand has a butyl liner and we were careful not to introduce nutrients and too much vegetation. The top pond is a mix of both, whatever you do for wildlife though a pond is probably the most important.

Dead Hedges

This technique of designing back in the waste from managing our greenspaces has been used by conservation groups for many years. It's a win/win - you get to dispose of the material onsite and wildlife gets a great habitat! We need to get this idea into our parks and gardens - it makes so much sense and if you get a bit creative can also become part of the aesthetic, integrating our waste into the design and fabric of our green space.

Bee Tower

Honey bees get all the press - they are social animals, you can't miss them if a swarm arrives and most importantly we get something from them; we take their winter food store - honey. Solitary bees, of which we have over 250 species, are quite laid back creatures most of us hardly notice. But this bunch are our most important pollinators; they are messy and less efficient at packing pollen, preferring to get it all over them and scrape off the excess when they get back to their nest. This makes them far more effective at transporting pollen from flower to flower, so be good to solitary bees, they are our most important ally. Plant flowers high in nectar and pollen then build them some space to nest. All you need to do is drill some holes in untreated timber between 3-10mm, fix it in a warm sheltered place facing south and wait. It's all good from then on.



Brownfield Garden
Our brownfield sites were recently described by Natural England as the 'rainforests of Britain' for the diversity of species on and in them. Unfortunately they look 'messy' and rarely elicit much public opposition to their destruction for development. Wildlife loves our mess, we just need to design the mess in a way that people can accept - that way we reuse our waste, create cool looking spaces and provide the best sites for much of our wildlife.

This is our attempt at starting that debate.

Sand Planter

We have been drilling holes in timber for many years to provide nesting space for our native solitary bees. That's all good but a majority of our native bees nest in the ground; last year we trialed what we are calling sand planters, a central pipe filled with soil surrounded by a perforated steel ring packed with sand. We are hoping this will be a way of getting a pile of sand into urban places and provide space for plants. The holes in the steel are 10mm diameter, big enough to let our native bees in but still contain the sand. Some bees like the vertical to nest and some prefer the horizontal. We really hope this will help to provide valuable nesting space into the heart of our cities.



Crushed Rubble Planting
We always knew that the best flower meadows occur on low nutrient soils. We also knew that brownfield sites were great for bugs, so 11 years ago we decided to scrape the top soil off a section of the most fertile but least diverse part of the garden and replace it with crushed brick and rubble in an attempt to mimic the brownfield we loved. Recently we had our wonderful friend James survey our garden for bugs and as we had thought the most interesting part of our 4 acre garden turned out to be this area of rubble. Happy days.

'Ephemeral Wetland'