

Make your own bug hotel

Credit: Tipperary County Council Library Service, Kilkenny Education Centre

Bug hotels or insect hotels are becoming a more and more common sight in parks and woodlands – and also in many gardens. They are a fantastic way to provide shelter and hiding places for insects. Their natural habitats of insect are being eroded by intensive farming, loss of hedgerows and the use of chemicals. Many of your garden's pollinators are solitary insects like butterflies, moths, ladybugs and solitary bees. These insects do not live in colonies and must find a warm, dry space to build their nests and to hibernate over the winter.

Insect hotels also encourage biodiversity in the garden which helps to increase the productivity and efficiency of the ecosystem. With a bug hotel you have a good chance of beneficial insects naturally visiting your garden.

Another aspect of course is the aesthetic value: a bug hotel can be a beautiful piece of garden art. You can enjoy watching many insects coming and going, maybe even start your own bug survey and learn more about the insects living in your hotel! Have a look at the National Parks and Wildlife Service wildlife guides, build a bug trap or go on a bug hunt and see how many insects you can identify in your bug hotel. Guides and activity details are available for download on www.livingearth.ie



Vine Weevil, Rove Beetle and Holly Blue. Photos: National Park and Wildlife Service.

Many large scale insect hotels are made from wooden pallets, pieces of tree trunks with different size holes drilled into them, roofing tiles drainpipes and they are crammed with straw, dry leaves, woodchips and more. Smaller ones often only consist of a single piece of wood with holes or several smaller sticks and bamboo canes, stones, straw and similar materials.

You see the common theme: materials that provide sturdy shelter with many holes and places where bugs and insects can hide. A bug hotel basically is a 'structured mess' as it is very aptly described by the Kilkenny Education Centre.

Carrick-on-Suir Library together with the local Men's Shed and primary school pupils have constructed a truly impressive structured mess made from pallets and filled with all kinds of natural materials.



Bug hotel project at Carrick-on-Suir Library with local primary school pupils and support from the Men's Shed.
Photos: Carol Delany, Carrick-on-Suir Library.

If you are at home, don't have much room and want to use only what you can find close to you, you can simply go for a plastic bottle, some dry leaves and sticks from a garden, park or woodlands nearby.



What you need

- Plastic bottle
- Scissors or cutter
- Sticks, leaves, moss, pine cones...
- Piece of string strong enough to hold your insect hotel

What to do

1. With the scissors or cutter carefully cut off the top part of the bottle so you get a cylinder with straight walls. Cut off all sharp edges.
2. Make a hole close to the bottom of the cylinder and another one straight up from there close to the open end.
3. Pull the piece of string through both holes and tie the ends. This loop will allow you to hang up your bug hotel once it is finished.
4. Shorten all sticks so that their length is the same as the height of the cylinder.
5. Put the sticks and cones into the cylinder as tight as possible, fill large gaps with moss but leave smaller gaps as they are.
6. Hang your bug hotel onto a tree and keep watch what happens over the course of several days and weeks. Be patient, insects won't just come overnight.



Cut a cylinder out of the plastic bottle. You can leave the bottom or take it off too. Make two holes – one close to the top edge and one straight down close to the bottom of the cylinder. Pull a piece of string through them. This is how you will hang it up once the hotel is ready. Make sure the sticks are about the same length as the cylinder.



Fill the 'shell' of the insect hotel with dry leaves and sticks and other natural material until it's tightly packed. Now it's time to hang it into a tree or somewhere in your garden, be patient and observe! Photos: Cordula Weiss