



Information Note: Habitat piles and stumperies



Rock/stone piles

In the countryside, dry stone walls are one of the best environments for wildlife. Creating nooks and crannies of various sizes between rocks offer shelter for small creatures including, amphibians, reptiles, insects and spiders.

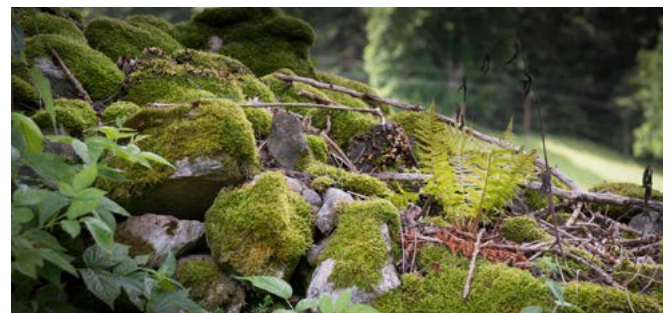
- One of the easiest way of incorporating this habitat into your outdoor space is by creating walls around raised beds. However, just piling some rocks together creates a similar environment. Or try making a dry stone and earth bank.
- A north-facing pile/wall provides for a wider range of plants and animals.

Establishing

- Rocks and stones sourced locally blend better with the surroundings and the local soil.
- Because the rock/stone piles act as 'corridors' for wildlife, leave a strip of uncut plant life or unmown either side to provide more shelter.
- Build a dry stone and earth bank by piling stones up loosely to form a double-sided wall, leaving a gap in between. Build in layers of soil between the stones and in the centre, but leave gaps so that creatures can get in and out. Cover the top with wider stones, again filling in any gaps with soil.

Maintaining

- Rock/stone piles need little maintenance. Depending on their location they can be allowed to fall apart over time, and then be roughly rebuilt.
- Monitor trees and shrubs nearby that might grow and damage a pile, bank or wall and keep any stray branches cut back.



Top tips

- Encourage lichens and mosses to colonise a new wall quickly by painting it with a mixture of yoghurt and manure.



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Log piles and stumperies

Log piles and stumperies mimic dead and fallen trees, providing food and shelter for a wealth of wildlife.

- Create a log pile by collecting logs and pile them horizontally. If you put some log piles in the shade (e.g. under a bush) and some in the sun, you will get different creatures living in the different log piles.
- Damp conditions behind peeling bark are very inviting for woodlice, spiders and beetles, while butterflies and ladybirds take up residence in the drier parts over the winter.
- As a precaution, avoid placing the pile too close to living trees and shrubs as bacteria and disease can be harboured in decaying logs.
- Don't disturb dead wood that's still standing, unless it's potentially dangerous. Dead branches left on the tree benefit many creatures, especially woodpeckers. If a tree has to be felled, leave the stump in situ.



Establishing

- Strangely, getting hold of logs may require a little imagination. Taking dead wood from the wild is not a good idea as it always benefits wildlife more if left where it has fallen. It may also be illegal to gather it in certain places. Friends, neighbours or parents who are having tree work done can be a good starting point or get in touch with a local tree surgeon. Hardwood logs (broadleaf trees) last longer than softwood (conifer trees) and ideally they should still have their bark in place.
- Use different lengths of logs but nothing too twiggy. Bury the lower logs into the soil a few centimeters deep. This keeps them damp and the resident creatures happy.
- Plant species such as ferns, bluebells and primroses around your log pile to encourage a woodland feel. A log pile or stumpery can be a great place to plant a flowering climber such as a honeysuckle to attract more insects.

Maintaining

- There is little maintenance required as the idea is really to leave the pile alone. However, in very dry conditions you may need to water the logs to maintain a damp atmosphere.
- You may need to add new logs as the original ones begin to disintegrate.
- For maximum habitat benefits it is best to leave the log pile/stumpery untouched and just observe the inhabitants from a distance. However, by carefully lifting a log from the pile you can get a close up view of the creatures living there. Ensure the log is carefully replaced to its original position.

Top tips

- Locating a log pile near a pond provides a bolt hole and hibernation site for frogs, toads and other amphibians.



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Stumperies

Similar to a rockery, a stumpery is made with parts of fallen trees such as stumps and logs. Using materials that may otherwise be wasted, stumperies offer an interesting way of using these materials, whilst providing a fantastic wildlife habitat.

Create a stumpery by standing logs closely together in a vertical position, half buried in soil. Ensure the logs are completely stable. Pack soil between the gaps to bury the bases of the logs.

These will support species like stag beetles that like damp, submerged dead wood.

Reference information from www.buglife.org.uk and www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk



Bee stumps

Solitary species such as mason bees are attracted to logs and dead trees, as they provide safe nesting sites in the form of hollow cavities. It's easy to buy off-the-peg bee hotels, but why not have a go at creating your own?

Choose a sunny area and set some tall logs or untreated wooden posts of about 2 metres length into the ground in an upright position. Using a drill, start to make holes in the post. Concentrate on the north facing side as bees prefer to nest in places that get the most sun.

Smaller bees will use holes 2-3mm across, across, while larger bees will use larger holes of 8-10mm diameter.

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