

Feeding your garden hedgehogs.

The hedgehog is probably one of our most distinguishable little garden animals with a coat of sharp spines and the ability to roll into a tight defense ball, this adorable little animal is like no other. In the wild, they live on a diet of insects like beetles, earthworms and other invertebrates, however they are opportunistic in their feeding habits and will eat almost anything, whether its nutritious enough or not. Human beings are the only mammals on the planet that drink milk after we have been weaned but for many years people would put out saucers of milk for their little nocturnal visitors, but we now know that hedgehogs are lactose intolerant and milk can cause them terrible digestive upset. Bread was also often put out for birds and soaked in milk for hedgehogs, but this is also a bad idea for the following reasons:



- 1) Bread soaked in milk is especially bad, as it is too soft for proper dental care.
- 2) Many animals, including us, cats and dogs, are intolerant of the lactose in milk, which in our wildlife can lead to diarrhoea causing dehydration.
- 3) Milk is iron deficient so taken in excess can cause dietary imbalance.
- 4) Sour milk can cause stomach ache and sickness if left out for any length of time.
- 5) Milk is an ideal to support the rapid increase of harmful bacteria in the stomach and intestines which causes diarrhea and other tummy and, potentially, skin problems.
- 6) Bread swells in the stomach making the animal or bird feel like they've had a good meal but without being very nutritional.
- 7) Bread is also full of sugar and salt, which can cause dietary upsets in mammals and birds.

When you are trying to survive a cold winter the last thing you need is to get ill!

Tinned and dry cat foods are far more efficient to hedgehogs for building up body fat reserves for a long cold winter. Supplementing the natural hedgehog diet throughout the year with dry cat food will also help pregnant sows and young hoglets if they are hungry. Remember not to over fill bowls though as the food we supply should supplement the natural food and not cause hedgehogs to become reliant on feeding stations and commercial food that can cause obesity and the unhealthy, sometimes life-threatening conditions that being obese can cause. Wildlife doesn't get fat unless humans are involved at the feeding table.

How can we help our garden hedgehogs?

- 1) If you have room have a compost heap Hedgehogs can dig around for the insects and worms that live there.
- 2) Leave an overgrown area of garden for hunting or for a nest to sleep in.
- 3) Feed dry dog or cat food as a dietary supplement in a hedgehog feeding station.
- 4) Please don't burn any leaf litter or garden waste as many insects, frogs and perhaps hedgehogs will call them home. If you must burn, then please check CAREFULLY that a hedgehog has not moved in. you can set a smaller fire nearby and feed the small pile from the larger one that may be home to a hedgehog.
- 5) Compost heaps are a lovely warm snug bed for the cold months but be careful if you are turning it with a garden fork, hedgehogs can be fatally wounded by garden works.



Conclusion:

- Milk, especially mixed with bread, is of no use as a dietary supplement for hedgehogs and is potentially harmful.
- Offer cat food but not fish flavoured feed as hogs are intolerant of fish protein. Dry food is best in a garden feeder.
- Provide a warm safe sleeping place and do not wake the hedgehog to check on him/her during the winter.
- Please keep children, dogs and cats away.
- Please check for sleeping hedgehogs before mowing or cutting long grass.
- Don't push the lawnmower under hedges as that's where a sleeping hedgehog may be and could suffer painful or fatal injuries.

Making a Hedgehog Home

Visit the British Hedgehog Preservation Society for more hints and tips and for details on how to make your own Hedgehog Hotel

<http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk>

Bev Truss RVN DipCAPBT (COAPE)
Licenced Wildlife Rehabilitator
www.thehogsprinkle.com

