

HEDGEHOG STREET



CITY OF WILDLIFE

HEDGEHOG HOMES

IN THE WILD

Efficient winter nests are essential if hedgehogs are to survive hibernation. Thus, in autumn, they begin to collect leaves, grass, straw, bracken, reeds etc. and use these materials for building their own nests under hedgerows, fallen logs or piles of brushwood. These “hibernacula” can be quite durable structures, lasting for many months. Whilst they are insulative, the most important role of them is in maintaining humidity during the hibernation period and preventing the animals from dying of dehydration.

IN THE GARDEN

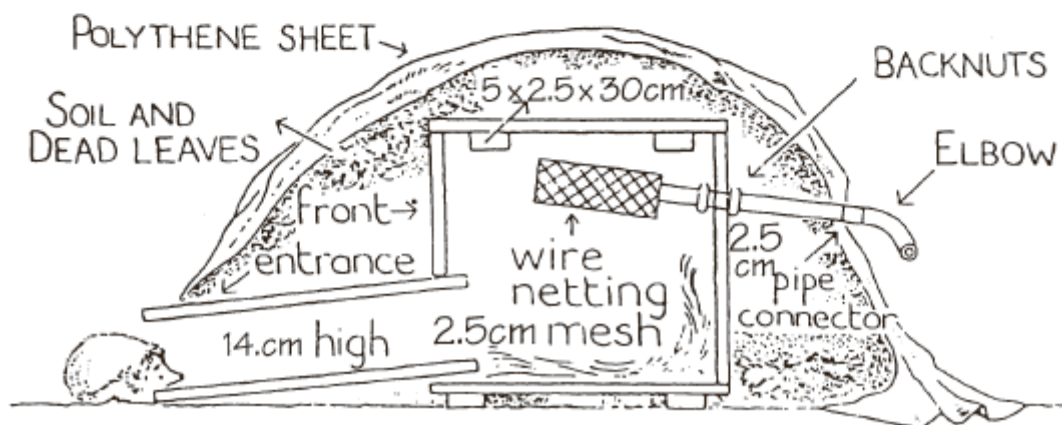
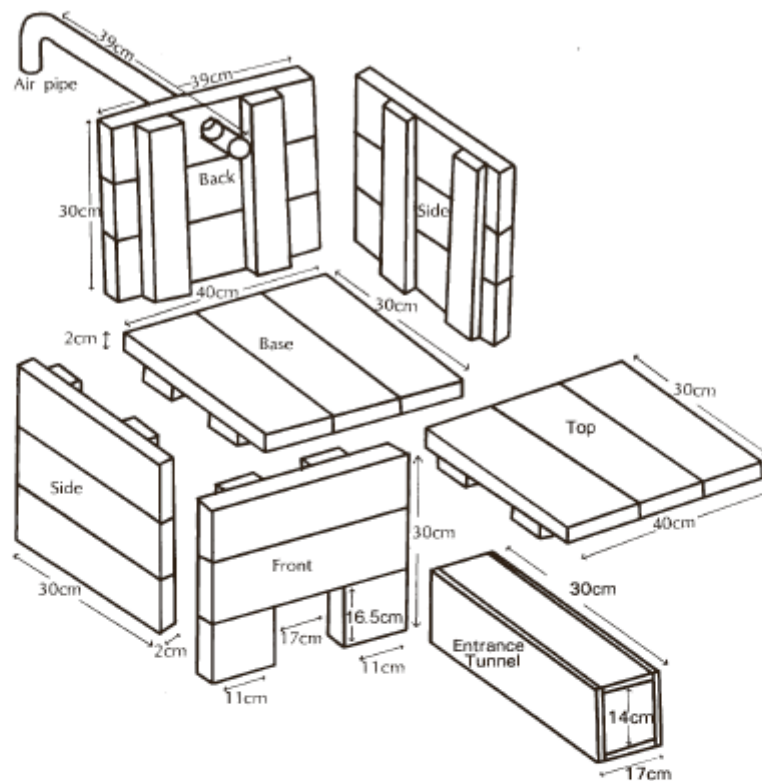
Most gardens have a supply of the materials mentioned above and suitable sites for nests - under sheds, compost heaps, shrubs and piles of leaves or behind stacks of logs and under spare building materials. In these circumstances, if hedgehogs want to spend a winter here, they should be able to get on and build their own shelters. However, you may wish to provide a man made alternative.

DIY HEDGEHOG HOUSE - SIMPLE

This is a very simple affair and easy to make. Get a big, thick cardboard box and cut two side air vents about 15cm by 5cm and an entrance about 15cm in diameter. Put some torn newspapers inside with clean, dry grass or straw on top and tuck the box near a hedge, if possible with the entrance facing South. The top of the box should then be covered with a small piece of plastic sheeting, for example an “opened up” old carrier bag. Twigs should be put all round to make a dome and then covered with dry grass and leaves.

DIY HEDGEHOG HOUSE - TRICKY

This design is recommended by BHPS and is a more permanent type of home. We recommend using untreated wood for hedgehog homes. Wood from certain softwood tree species grown in the UK, such as larch, Douglas-fir and red cedar have excellent durability as exterior timbers. Pretreated or tanalised wood can contain chromated copper arsenate (CCA) compounds that are hazardous to many species. Do not nail down the roof as you may need to clean the box in the future. The entrance tunnel could be constructed with old bricks placed on top of each other with a piece of slate with a brick on top for the roof. Make sure the entrance is kept clear and avoid the temptation to disturb the hedgehogs. The finished home could be covered with plastic sheeting, soil and twigs placed on top, or left as it is.



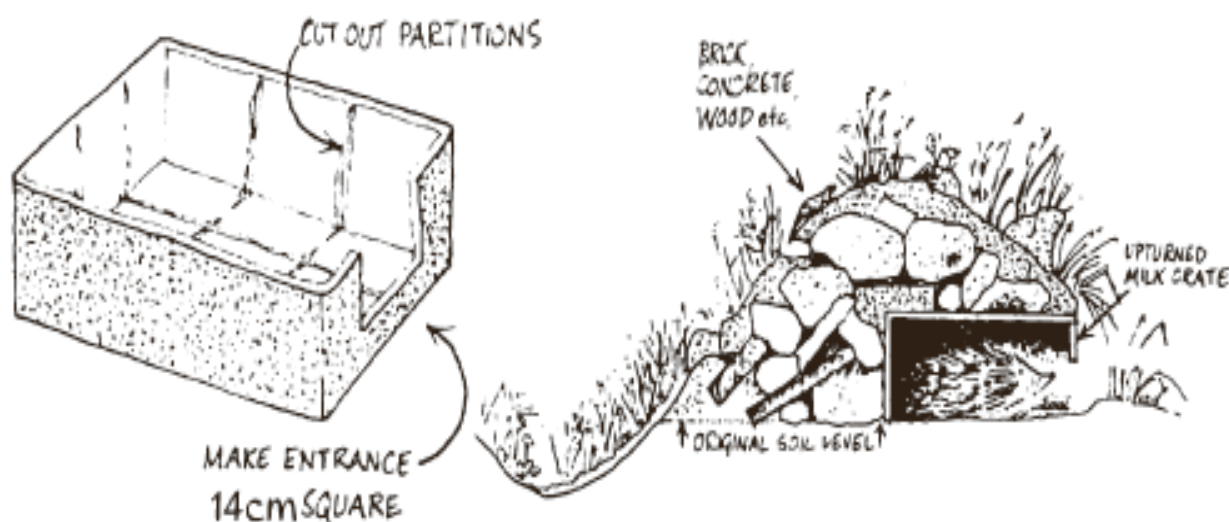
Straw and any leaves left outside may be taken in and used for bedding by any prospective resident. See illustration above.

DIY HEDGEHOG HOUSE - RECYCLED

A plastic storage box or an upturned milkcrate (preferably plastic) buried into a mound is another alternative. A hedgehog "Prefab"! Cut out any internal partitions of the crate with a coping saw or secateurs and make the entrance about 14cm square in one end of the crate, avoid leaving "rough" edges. Set the crate into your rubbish mound and camouflage it well outside. Inside you can make it more inviting to hedgehogs by covering the floor with soil and leaves, or even torn up newspaper and a few small sticks.

When you have made a hedgehog house, place it in a quiet part of your garden, preferably against a bank, wall or fence and hope that you will have a visit from a

friend seeking a home. Make sure the entrance to the house does not face North or North East, thus avoiding the cold winter winds. It may then become the winter home for some lucky hedgehog. If female, she may even have her young in it in the spring. After winter use, late March/early April, it may need to be cleaned out and, to some extent fumigated or washed out. To make sure there is nobody in residence, put a small light obstruction in the entrance to see whether it is pushed away overnight, if it isn't this is an indication that the hedgehog may no longer be in residence (but take care just in case). You can clean the house using an organic Pyrethrum powder, suitable for caged birds.



On no account should the hedgehog house be creosoted or “treated” as the fumes remain for a long time and can be very harmful.

There are various “ready-made” hedgehog homes on the market, but there is no evidence to suggest that they are used more readily than these DIY options.