

Give a hog a home



What you will need:

- three sheets of exterior plywood, at least 15 mm thick, and 600 mm wide by 2000 mm long
- saw
- hammer
- nails / screws
- small handsaw
- short length of narrow drainpipe
- dried leaves

Step by step guide

1 Understand the basic principles of a hedgehog home. They should have a large compartment that is insulated from cold and heat, with a smaller entrance corridor that will keep your hedgehogs safe from badgers, dogs or other predators.

2 Short on time or tools? Buy a hedgehog home. There are lots of designs on the market but make sure they fulfil the principles above.

3 Make your hedgehog home. Cut out sections as shown on the diagram and nail all the pieces together except the roof.

Fill the chamber with a layer of dead, dry leaves. Then screw the roof to the box so that you can remove it in future to clean the box out. And place the narrow drainpipe in the hole at the back for ventilation.

You might want to get creative and design one from logs or old packing cases, as long as you follow the basic principles.

How you design your roof depends on your carpentry prowess. You can turn it vertically, give it a pitched one or make it in the shape of St Paul's Cathedral!

4 Now you've finished making your box, find somewhere suitable to put it. Hedgehogs can be a little fussy about where they live. The box needs to be out of direct sunlight, and the front entrance should be out of the wind, which is generally north or north east.

A quiet part of the garden under thick vegetation or behind a shed is ideal.

5 Cover the outside in a pile of woody garden cuttings and leaves. You can, if you like, even cover it with soil, leaving just the entrance hole and ventilation pipe free.

6 Aftercare. Every year or two, it's worth clearing out the hedgehog home. You can do this in April, after their hibernation but before hedgehogs starting producing hoglets. However, the ideal time is in October before they go into hibernation, and after most of the litters have been weaned.

7 Monitoring your hedgehog home.

Remember that you won't see any activity between October and March / April when they're hibernating.

If you'd like to find out if your box is being used, put something in front of the entrance that won't blow away but can be easily moved by a hedgehog, like a crumpled up piece of newspaper. If a hedgehog is at home, you'll find it moved by the next morning.

