

Tips for planning practical conservation work in parks and green spaces

- Start by checking with the relevant Community Park Manager whether there are any existing plans for the green space.
- Try to find out as much about the existing wildlife value of the site as you can. This is important because it is possible to cause damage to wildlife if you do not know it is there.

For example, it would be a mistake to plant trees in grassland which is rich in wildflowers because the trees will eventually shade the flowers out. Some animal species are protected by law and it is an offence to even disturb them. To clean out a pond which is home to great crested newts, for example, requires a license from Natural England.
- Ask the Community Park Manager whether any surveys have been carried out in the area and contact the Bristol and Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) to find out what wildlife records they hold for the site. Local people may also have useful information.
- Seek advice if possible from an ecological expert. Staff within the Natural Environment Team of Bristol Parks may be able to help. If funding is available, you may find it helpful to pay an ecologist to carry out a survey and give you some advice.
- Once you have obtained all the information and advice you can, put together a plan. It is a good idea to consult local people on your plan, especially if it involves some ideas which may be controversial. For example, turning an area of closely mown amenity grassland into a wildflower meadow may cause problems if local children like to play football there.
- If you are planning to plant trees, shrubs or wildflowers, choose native species wherever possible and try to obtain plants which originate from this part of the country. For more information, see www.floralocale.org
- Always ask the Community Park Manager for permission before you carry out your plan. Remember that any changes you make to your park or green space will have implications for future management. New hedges may need to be trimmed and wildflower meadows will need cutting so it is important that Bristol Parks have committed to the project, even if your hope is that volunteers will do much of the work.
- Make sure that you carry out practical conservation work at the right time of year for the task you are undertaking. See the timetable for more information on this.

Timetable

Task	Time of year	Reason
Tree and hedge planting	Oct–Feb	Plant during the dormant season.
Sowing a wildflower meadow or planting wildflower plugs	Sep–Nov	Some seeds need to overwinter in order to germinate. Others can be planted in spring, but are much more susceptible to drought at this time of year.
Cutting a wildflower meadow	Jun–Sep	Cut meadows once the plants have finished flowering but during the growing season so that nutrients are removed. Remove all the cuttings to avoid nutrient build-up (which will encourage plants like nettles and thistles).
Cutting bramble and scrub	Oct–Feb	Cut outside the bird nesting season.
Trimming a hedge	Dec–Feb	Hedges should be cut outside the bird nesting season, and ideally after the hedge shrubs have borne fruit.
Laying a hedge	Oct–Feb	Must be carried out during the dormant season.
Coppicing trees	Oct–Feb	Should be done during the dormant season and outside the bird nesting season
Removal of Himalayan balsam	Apr–Jun	This invasive plant should be pulled up before it sets seed in June.
Cleaning out a pond	Sep–Nov	Disturbance to pond life is minimised outside of the breeding season (spring/summer) but before hibernation begins.
Creating a new pond	Any time of year	Can be carried out at any time, but is most likely to be colonised by wildlife in spring and summer
Putting up bird boxes	Any time of year	Ideally by February to allow them to be used as quickly as possible