

Garden Charter


Good practices to promote the survival of hedgehogs, birds, butterflies and all Biodiversity.



If you see this sign on a garden fence, it shows that its owners have signed up to the Garden Charter (in French: Charte des Jardins, in German: Garten-Charta). They have made the moral commitment to keep up and organise their piece of land in such a way as to enable the survival of wildlife such as birds, hedgehogs, butterflies, lizards, etc.

In years gone by, these friendly visitors were frequently to be seen – even in built-up areas. In many gardens, they could find food to eat and safe places to rest, reproduce, or hibernate. But areas suitable for small, wild animals are becoming increasingly rare. Rough patches between properties, or between houses and open fields, are being “cleaned up” or built upon. In many parts of the world, under the pressure of urbanisation large holdings are being cut up into smaller tenancies, leading to the removal of the hedges, stone walls and rotting logs that many species call home.

Faced with smaller plots of land, it is tempting for gardeners to work in a more “concentrated” way, trimming the lawn up to the very edge of the property, planting exotic shrubs that may conceal the neighbours from view – but will not sustain butterflies nor produce any fruit for the birds – and by cutting back the trees so that they offer no opportunities for nesting. Other unfortunate trends are setting up garden lights that are left on all night, as well as the use of pesticides and other chemicals that seep through the soil where they may contaminate the water table (a source of drinking water in many areas). Under such conditions, birds and other visitors to the garden have literally nowhere to hide, no building materials, nothing to eat, and sometimes no clear distinction between night and day.

The following pages give a few examples of good practices to promote Biodiversity in gardens, within the framework of the Garden Charter. Further information can be found (in French and German) on the web site of the Energy and Environment departments of the Swiss Cantons: www.energie-environnement.ch 

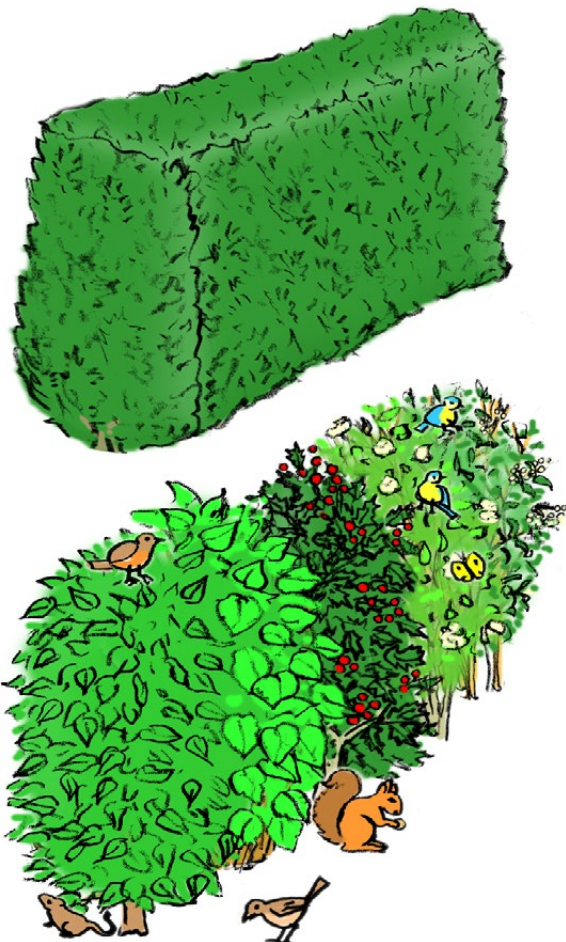
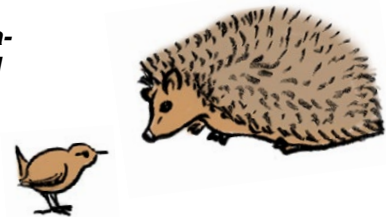
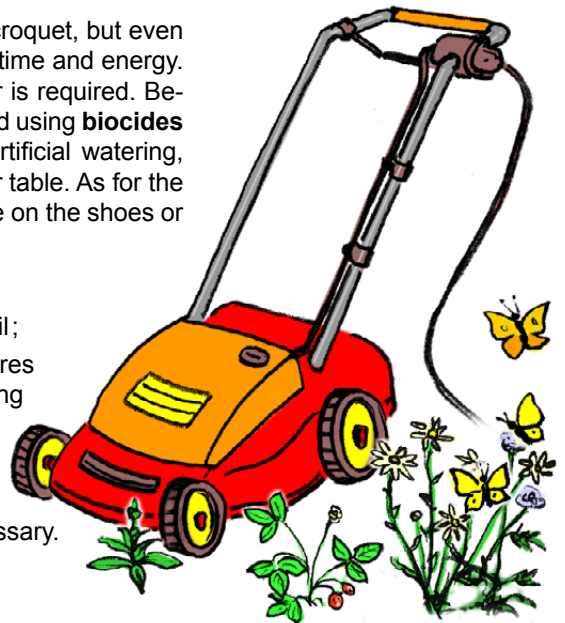
The lawn

A trim lawn may be handy for playing tennis or the occasional game of croquet, but even the casual gardener knows that it requires a considerable investment in time and energy. Because the grass is cut so low, evaporation increases and more water is required. Because plant species other than grass are not tolerated, it is difficult to avoid using **biocides** such as *selective herbicides* and *anti-moss agents*. With the rain or artificial watering, these chemicals seep into the soil where they can contaminate the water table. As for the chemicals that remain on the surface, they may be brought into the home on the shoes or clothing of the gardener or other visitors.

It is possible to obtain a respectable lawn without chemicals by:

- tolerating clover and other small flowers that bring nitrogen into the soil;
- mowing the lawn a bit higher than usual, at a level of about 6 centimetres (2.5 inches); most gardeners cut their grass far too low, without knowing that this favours fast-growing weeds such as dandelions over grass;
- using a lawn-mower that mulches the grass into fragments that are left on the ground;
- scarifying the soil during the autumn, and adding compost when necessary.

- ***I promise not to use biocides in my garden (no herbicides, no anti-moss agents, etc.)***
- ***To allow plant and animal species to survive and carry out their life cycle, I leave them a patch of long-growing grass – perhaps alongside a hedge or on a small mound – that I will not mow all summer (or at least as long as there are flowers growing on it).***
- ***If I am in a position to create a new lawn, I choose a mix of grass seeds that does not require any treatment with chemical agents. I use combinations of local plant species which include flowers for the areas that I will not be mowing during most of the season.***



Hedges

Laurel, thuya or bamboo hedges are popular because they grow quickly and can block out the undesired view of a neighbour's house or garden. But a hedge made up of a single exotic species is useless as a source of food or shelter for most insects, birds, or other small animals. A hedge combining various indigenous* shrubs is far more welcoming: blossoms will occur at different times during the year, produce a variety of fruit and nuts, and help butterflies and other vulnerable species complete their life cycle.

In temperate European climates, look out for boxwood, yew, holly, privet, hornbeam and beech (hornbeam and beech are deciduous but since their dry leaves remain on the twigs throughout the winter, they can contribute to a visual barrier effect).

Fruit or nut-producing shrubs such as hazelnut, dogwood and blackthorn will support many species. It is important to be aware that some "mixed" or "varied" hedges on the market do not contain indigenous species at all and/or do not produce the fruit and nuts required to sustain wildlife.

- ***In order to procure food for birds, squirrels and other small animals, I promise to plant in my garden and in my hedges several different indigenous species of shrubs and bushes.***
- ***Whenever a large plant needs to be replaced, I will prefer to choose an indigenous bush, shrub or tree.***
- ***To let animal species accomplish their life cycle (in particular birds and their requirements for nests), I trim my hedges as little as possible during the Spring and Summer seasons. When I do trim, I avoid removing flowers, fruits and nuts.***

* **Indigenous plant** = wild plant from the region, and also from southern Europe, to adapt the garden vegetation to the current climate warming.

What is a “clean garden”?

A totally level lawn, mown up to the edges of the property and with no twigs to be seen may be “clean” but it is a no-man’s-land for nature. When young blackbirds tumble from their nests, they are hardly able to fly. For several days, they shelter under fallen or low-lying branches while their parents feed them on the ground. Hedgehogs need to burrow under dead leaves, to create a little hollow where they can survive the winter. As for lizards, they are on the look-out for stones that capture the heat of the sun, so they can regulate their own temperature. A remarkable number of butterflies can survive the frost – as a caterpillar, a chrysalis, or in adult form – if only they can find shelter under leaves, grass, bark, or stones.

An overly “clean” garden is a dead one, with minimal biodiversity and no raw material for building nests or other shelters. To attract small wildlife, a good start is to construct a “hotel” for various creepy-crawlies in one corner of the garden. It is sufficient to throw a couple of leafy branches over a handful of stones, and then let ivy and other plants grow freely over them.

- ***In order to create a haven for small animals, I promise to leave in a corner of my garden – all year round – a heap of stones, rotting branches and dead leaves.***

- ***When I am trimming my trees or hedges, I set aside a few branches (especially if they are already dry because they may be partly hollow) for my “hotel”. If there is no risk of them falling onto someone, I leave some dead branches on the trees instead of cutting them off.***



Biocides (pesticides)

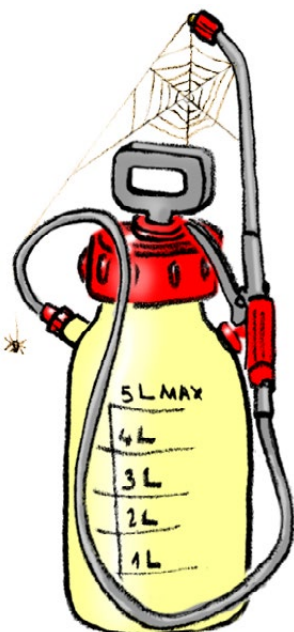
Such chemicals are a big problem, not only for animals and plants trying to eke out an existence in people's gardens, but also for humans. The term “biocide” covers all chemical substances designed to kill a particular class of living beings: herbicides (anti-weed, anti-grass or anti-moss agents), insecticides, fungicides (against mushrooms and other kinds of fungus), acaricides (against spiders and similar arthropods).

Whether they are used in agriculture or in private gardens, biocides seep into the soil where they can contaminate underground water supplies as well as lakes and rivers. They can also contaminate the home, by riding air currents into the house, or they can hitch a ride on people's clothes, or on the paws and fur of domestic animals.

Roses are a case in point. Even the best gardeners are tempted to make an exception and use chemicals for their roses. But that is the best way of poisoning the ladybirds, who really are the gardener's best friends. Rather than spraying the flowerbeds “just in case”, it is better to wait and see. If a problem does appear, the appropriate treatment for that particular situation can then be implemented. Treatment may be avoided altogether by opting for highly resistant varieties which are now becoming available commercially.

In 2001, Swiss law made it **illegal** to use herbicides along paths, roads, parking lots, etc. – even on one's own property, because of the risk of contaminating rivers, lakes and underlying aquifers.

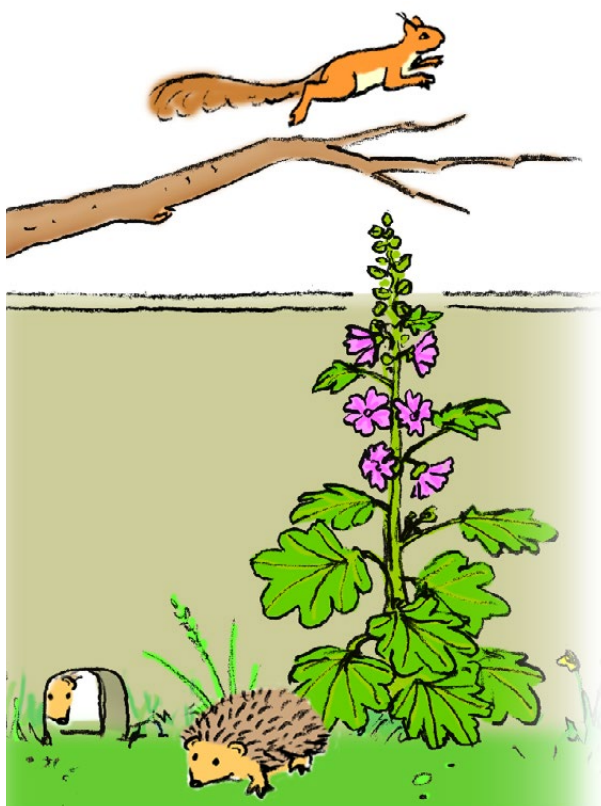
- ***In order to protect my own health, as well as drinking water supplies and biodiversity, I use as few biocides (pesticides) as possible. If and when I use any, I opt for natural biocides made of natural products.***
- ***Whenever I plant or replace a rosebeds, I choose naturally resistant varieties.***
- ***I respect the law and therefore do not use herbicides along paths or roads or around my property. If I ever need to remove all plant life from an area, I use thermal weed control instead.***



Garden lighting

Light pollution - an excess of outdoor lighting - disrupts the life and biological rhythm of the many nocturnal animals that inhabit our gardens: bats, hedgehogs, owls, toads, insects... Light, irresistibly attractive to moths, many of whom are valuable pollinators, causes their death from exhaustion. Finally, artificial light increases the vulnerability of resting birds by making them easier for cats to spot.

- **To preserve nightlife and rest, I pledge to turn off unnecessary garden lighting (after 10 pm).**
- **I choose outdoor lamps that reflect light downward, rather than upward to illuminate the sky.**
- **I choose LED bulbs with a color temperature of 2700°K or less (warm white) because they are less attractive to insects**



Hedgehogs & Co

Hedgehogs need to move from one garden to another, to find a partner, forage for food or drink, or seek a place to spend the winter. Gardens with no connection between them force the hedgehogs onto the road... Even the edge of a pavement (sidewalk) can be a challenging obstacle for a hedgehog, and an impassable barrier for newts, blindworms, etc.

As for squirrels, they depend on connecting or adjacent tree branches for moving quickly and safely from one tree to another. If such connections are unavailable, they will be seen running from one tree to another, at the mercy of cats, dogs... and cars...

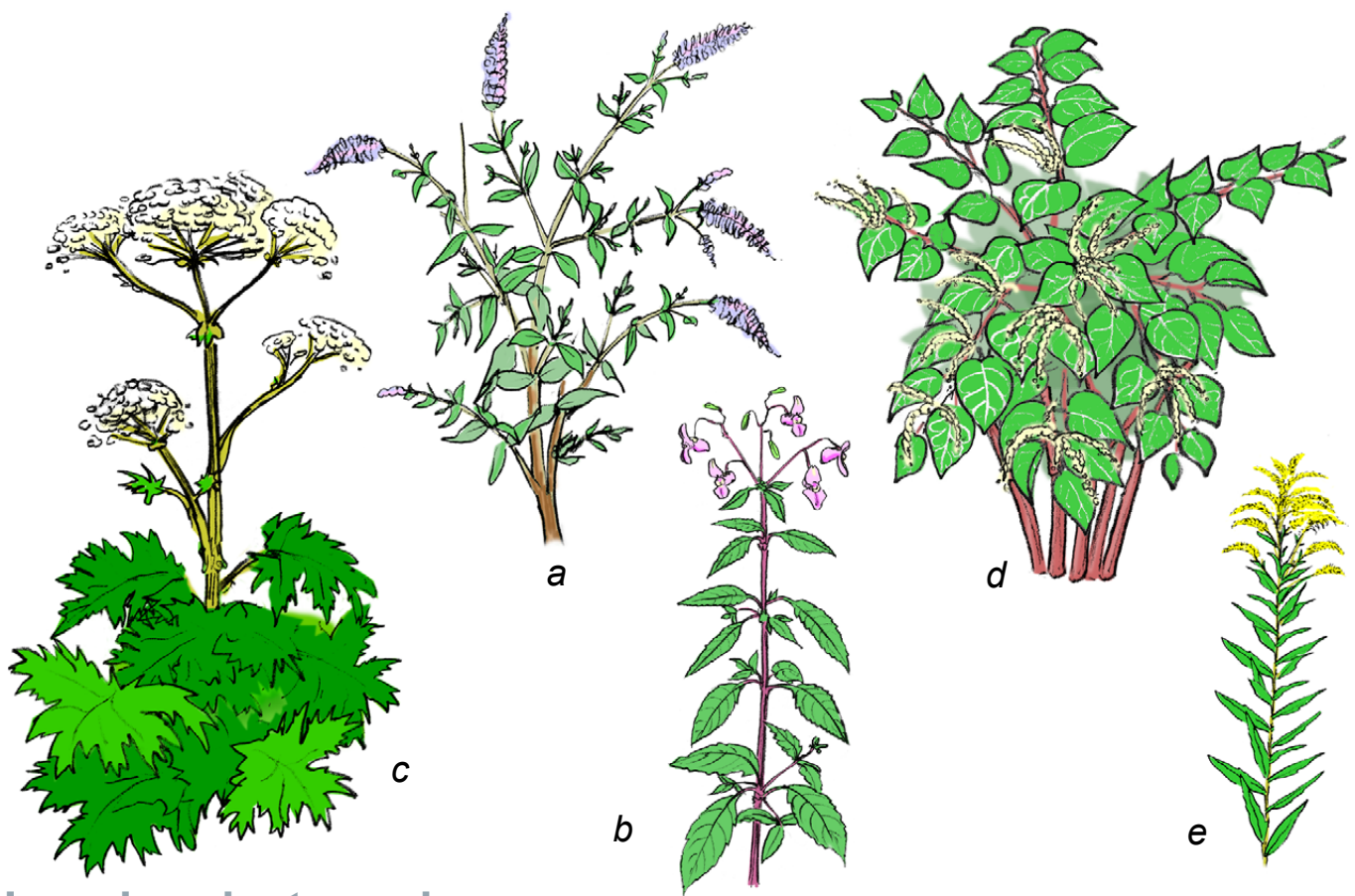
- **To enable small animals to move from one garden to another without undue risk, I create and maintain small 12 x 12 centimetre passages to and from neighbouring properties. Of course, I discuss this beforehand with my neighbours, explaining the importance of these corridors for hedgehogs and other species.**
- **When I consider trimming or cutting back the branches of my trees, I remember that squirrels need to be able to leap from one tree to another.**

Slugs

Slugs have few allies and it certainly is frustrating to see one's salads or flowerbeds being eaten up by these slimy creatures. However strongly one may feel, it would be a great mistake to use metaldehyde granules against slugs because they are toxic for a whole range of life forms, including domestic animals and humans. A better option is iron orthophosphate (also available as granules) but the more logical course is to hunt down and destroy the slugs individually, at dawn or dusk. A short, sharp nip to the back of the head (into the brain) with a knife or a pair of scissors ensures that only the slugs bear the brunt of the anti-slug campaign.

- **To avoid intoxicating all the wildlife in the garden, including hedgehogs who are the slugs' natural predators, I never use metaldehyde granules and use orthophosphate instead. Even better, I hunt down the slugs myself at dawn or after dusk.**





Invasive plant species

Several plant species hailing from other continents are out-performing local flora because they grow quickly and are more efficient at reproducing themselves (each continent has its own invasive species imported from afar). In Europe, the *Butterfly bush* (*Buddleia*), the *Japanese knotweed* (*Fallopia japonica*) and the *Himalayan balsam* (*Impatiens glandulifera*) proliferate in river bank areas where they displace native species, weaken the soil, and lead to increased erosion.

Most of these unwanted plants originate from private gardens. They reproduce easily with fast-growing seeds, or can generate new plants from branch or root fragments. It is better to avoid planting such exotic ornamentals out of doors in the first place. If any such species are already present, they should be removed completely with all their roots and destroyed rather than mixed with compost.

- **For the sake of my garden, and to prevent invasive exotic plant species from invading other areas, I will not plant any such species on my property: *Butterfly bush* (a), *Impatiens glandulifera* (b), *Giant Hogweed* (c), *Japanese knotweed* (d) and plants of the *Solidago* genus native to North America (e).**



Cats



The favourite pet of many humans, the cat is also the most dangerous predator in a garden – not to mention its frequent visits to other gardens in the neighbourhood. Cats catch and kill young birds, not only those who fall from their nests, but also those whose life cycle includes learning how to fly on the ground (blackbirds, robins, black redstarts). Cats also go after lizards, butterflies and shrews. This is no doubt a fully natural instinct; less natural is the high density of felines in residential areas: it is not rare for ten cats to pass through a garden during a single night.

- **To give birds and other animals a chance, I equip my cat with a collar bell so that they can hear him/her coming (observe the cat and listen to make sure that the cat has not learned to prowl without making the bell tingle). If I spot any young birds on the ground, I keep my cat indoors for a few days (usually in late spring – early summer).**

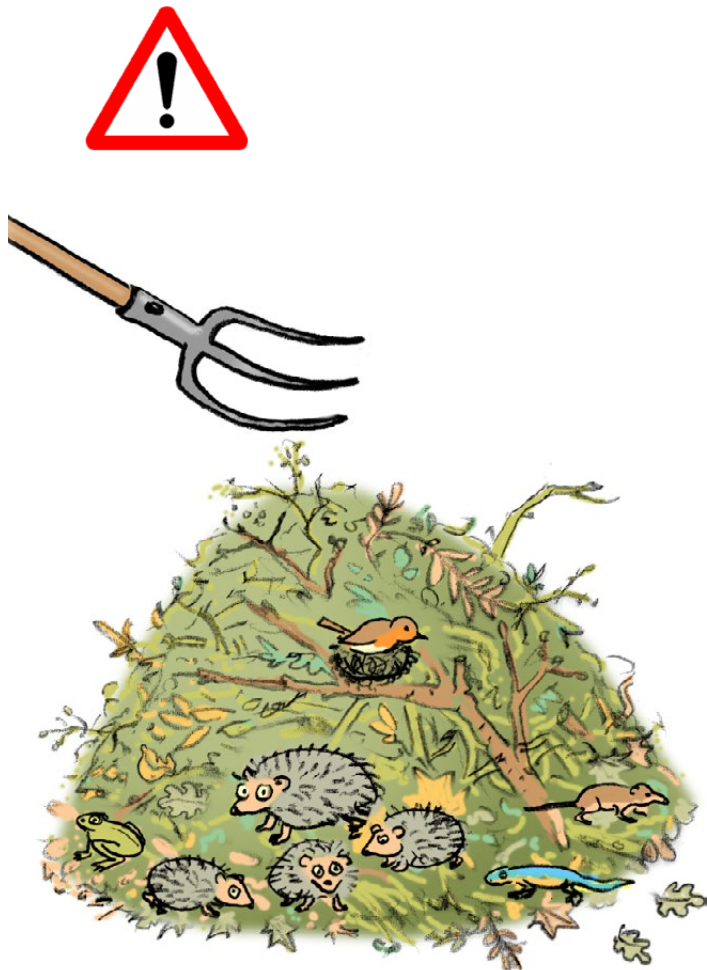
Brush piles

A large pile of leaves and branches seems to have been forgotten in a corner of the garden?

Think carefully before removing it because it may already contain a family of hedgehogs or a robin's nest. Newts, salamanders or other endangered amphibians may have concealed themselves underneath it. If it is absolutely necessary to remove the brush pile, early autumn is probably the best moment: between the nesting and hibernating seasons.

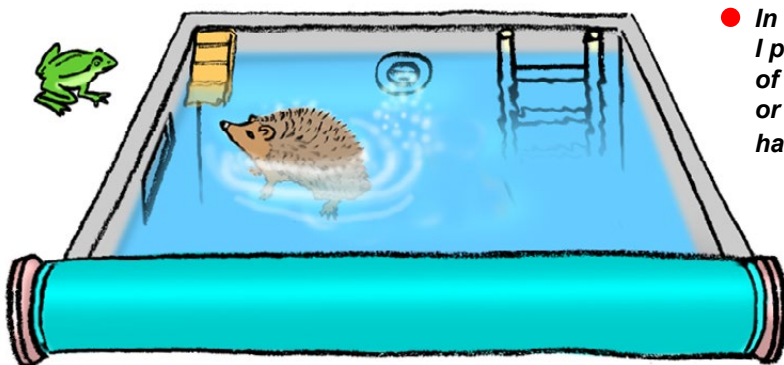
In Switzerland, the Federal law protecting air quality (OPair/LRV) states that it is an offence to burn branches or leaves in a private garden. There may be exceptions at the community (commune/Gemeinde) level – the best option is to ask one's local authorities. By and large, if bonfires are tolerated, it is under the condition that all the materials to be burned are dry, and that the smoke causes no distress to neighbours. In particular, it is forbidden to burn any non-natural materials such as furniture or any treated wood (including fences).

- ***In order to preserve any wildlife that may have found refuge under a heap of branches or leaves, I will not remove them during the nesting or hibernating seasons.***
- ***I am aware of and I follow local regulations about bonfires.***



Swimming-pool

Source of relaxation par excellence, the swimming pool can turn into a watery trap for hedgehogs and other small animals – unless the owner has thought of placing a ramp or another water-exiting device on the side of the pool. At night, lighting up the pool transforms it into a deadly trap for moths and other nocturnal insects.



- ***In order to prevent small animals from drowning, I promise to install a non-slip ramp on the side of the pool: at least 10 cm wide, with grooves or holes so that the animals can grip onto it and haul themselves out of the water.***
- ***To avoid attracting moths and other nocturnal animals, I do not light the pool needlessly at night.***



www.charte-des-jardins.ch
www.garten.charta.ch

energie-environnement.ch

Plateforme d'information des services
cantonaux de l'énergie et de l'environnement



How do I sign up to the Garden Charter?

Through an association or local community

Some communities (communes/Gemeinden) or neighbours' groups manage the Garden Charter themselves: they promote the concept locally, organise the signing-up of members, distribute the wooden signs, and set up various activities to improve biodiversity in their area. This is probably the best way of doing it, because one of the aims of the Garden Charter is to link gardens to each other, so that the wildlife can flow naturally from one property to another without being impeded by walls, barriers or roads.

Local communities or associations who choose to manage the Garden Charter are allowed to modify the registration form and the address in order to adapt them to local conditions. They usually present new members with the emblem of the charter.

Individual membership (see page 8)

If a person is interested in signing up but no collective entity is managing the Garden Charter in their area, they may opt for individual membership. They can use the registration form at the end of the Charter (on page 8) or sign up on the charte-des-jardins.ch web site. In both cases, they will be acknowledged on energie-environnement.ch, the web site of the Swiss Cantons' services for energy and environmental affairs.

The registration form is also useful for ordering the emblem of the Charter, created by a sheltered workshop which will send a bill for its work.

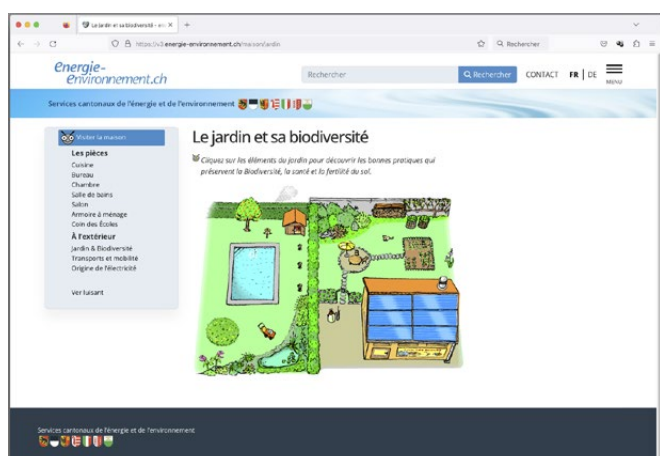
More information, moving forward



www.charte-des-jardins.ch

www.garten-charta.ch

These web pages (in French and in German) introducing the Garden Charter are hosted by the energie-environnement.ch web site (see below). They explain what the Charter is, how to sign up and how to obtain an emblem. As well as the Charter itself, many documents can be downloaded such as the logo, posters, flyers or nametags for native plants.



www.energie-environnement.ch

www.energie-umwelt.ch

This interactive web site (in French and in German) is managed by the services for energy and for environmental affairs of the Swiss cantons (Bern, Fribourg/Freiburg, Jura, Geneva, Neuchatel, Valais/Wallis and Vaud) who initiated the Garden Charter. It features a house set in a virtual garden which is open for exploration. Animations give lots of tips for improving biodiversity in one's garden. The house can be visited too: its rooms are full of ideas on how to lead a sustainable and healthy life.

Applying for individual membership of the Garden Charter



Please fill out this form and send it to the address underneath.

It is not compulsory to order an emblem (only in French or in German), nor to display it, but that is a good way of raising awareness about the Garden Charter.

Please check the relevant box/boxes ☒

☐ I have read the 6 pages of the Garden Charter. I understand that the charter is not a legal contract. Therefore the Garden Charter cannot be used by anyone to constrain or restrict me, my relations or my property in any way whatsoever. By signing this document, I assume **the moral undertaking** to respect the spirit of the Garden Charter and implement its best practices.

☐ I do not want to order an emblem.

I would like to order the following emblem/emblems :

☐ **A. An acrylic emblem** with 4 screw holes for fastening (15 x 15 cm), grey colour, sun and rain **resistant**. 18 Swiss Francs (VAT and postage included).

☐ **B. A black aluminium emblem with a sticker on the back** (7 x 7 cm), which can be fixed on a surface such as a letter box, sun and rain **resistant**. 8 Swiss Francs (VAT and postage included).

☐ **C. An emblem in larch wood** (20 x 20 cm), laser engraved and coated with a layer of natural oil (to be redone once a year), **not very resistant to sun or rain**, 29 Swiss Francs (VAT and postage included).

☐ **Emblem(s) in French** ☐ **Emblem(s) in German** (Garten-Charta)

The emblems can only be delivered to addresses in Switzerland. They will be sent to you directly by the sheltered workshop that creates them (the FOVAHM, based in Sion). If several emblems are ordered at the same time, a reduction in postal fees will be granted.



A



B



C

The logo of the Garden Charter (in English) is available on www.charte-des-jardins.ch

Surname : _____ First Name : _____

Address : _____

Post code (ZIP) : _____ Town : _____

Telephone : _____ E-mail : _____

☐ The garden is at the same address as above. ☐ Other address : _____

☐ I am in charge of the upkeep of the garden. ☐ The garden's upkeep is ensured by a gardener

Comments : _____

Date and place : _____ Signature : _____

Please return to :

energie-environnement.ch
Charte des Jardins
Rue du Tunnel 7
CH-1227 Carouge