

Learning about hibernation and helping hedgehogs

Support your children to learn about hibernation and looking after any hedgehogs that may appear in your nursery garden.

During autumn the daylight hours start to get shorter, the weather turns colder and food for many animals and insects becomes scarcer. To help them get through the winter months some animals go into hibernation.

What is hibernation?

Animals prepare for hibernation during the summer months by eating lots and storing body fat to see them through their hibernation period. Some animals gather and store food to see them through the winter. Hibernation is a very deep sleep, the animals' body temperature drops and both its heartbeat and breathing slow down to ensure very little energy is used.



Facts about hedgehogs:

- Hedgehogs are one of only three British mammals that hibernate (the others are dormice and bats)
- They usually hibernate between November and March
- Hedgehogs have to reach a weight of 600g to survive during the winter
- If a hedgehog is ever seen out in the daytime, then it is in trouble and the nearest hedgehog rescue centre should be contacted.
- Hedgehogs are great for your garden as their diet consists of insects, worms, slugs and other garden creatures

Think about how you can make your nursery garden attractive to hedgehogs and support them in their hibernation preparation. Hedgehogs can travel for up to a mile a night and you may get several visiting your setting's garden. To ensure your visitors have access you may need to create a hole in your fence or hedge.

How can your nursery children help hedgehogs?

- **Make a hedgehog home**

Leave a wild, long grass section in your garden or piles of logs and leaves that hedgehogs can make a nest in or you can buy a purpose built home.

- **Provide food and fresh water**

Providing food and fresh water in your settings' outdoor area will encourage hedgehogs to return. Leave out foods like minced meat, tinned dog or cat food (not fish-based), crushed cat biscuits or chopped boiled eggs. Specialist hedgehog food can also be bought from wild bird food suppliers. You can either make your own hedgehog feeding station or you can purchase one from a retailer. Never give milk or bread to a hedgehog. All hedgehogs are lactose intolerant and giving them milk could cause them to die, instead provide fresh water.