

MAKING A HOUSE FOR YOUR HEDGEHOG

As a result of its research the Henry Doubleday Research Association has produced a design for a hedgehog house, which is illustrated. One of its characteristics is that it can be produced quite cheaply and effectively by even the most clumsy handyman as long as he can manage to wield a hammer, saw and brace and bit.

You will need the following wood:

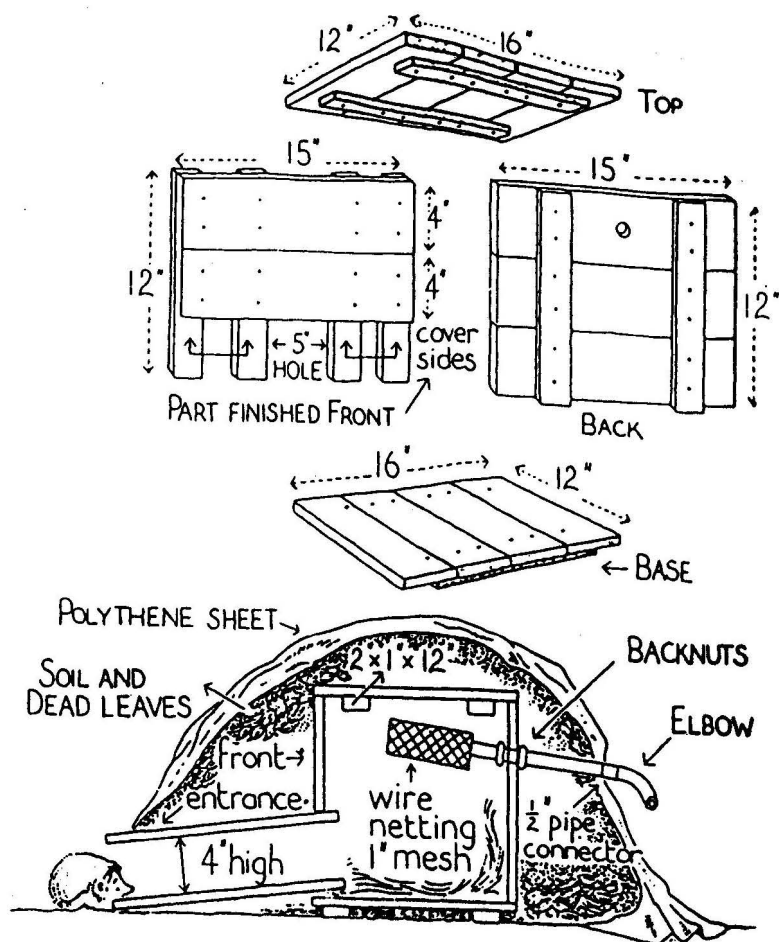
- 3m (10ft) pieces of 5 x 2.5cm (2 x 1").
- 4.5m (15ft) lengths of 10cm x 18mm (4 x 3/4") planks.
- 38cm (15in) lengths of 10cm x 18mm (4 x 3/4").

The wood can be purchased either rough-sawn or ready planed. The former is obviously cheaper. You may also be able to obtain some of the wood from a local demolition site. One word of advice: although you might be tempted to creosote the house to protect it from the weather, if you do so you will certainly not attract your hedgehogs. They don't seem to like even the faintest smell of either creosote or paint. For preference untreated wood should be used, although if you do need to use something then the wood should be treated with clear Cuprinol.

The entrance tunnel is the first part to be made, and in it four pieces of 10cm x 18mm (4 x 3/4") are fitted so that they make a run which is 10cm (4") high and 7.5cm (3") wide. A large hedgehog will be able to get through this, because it can 'lower' its spines, but it will prevent interested dogs from using it. Perhaps cats might be inquisitive, but they are likely to beat a hasty retreat once they realise that they have a confrontation with an irate and very prickly animal!

Three 37cm (15") pieces are nailed one above the other to 30cm (12") pieces at each end to make a 30cm (12") high back. The next step is to make the lid and the bottom, in which four pieces of 30cm (12") long 10cm x 18mm wood (4 x 3/4") are nailed onto two pieces of 5 x 2.5cm (2 x 1"), ensuring that those for the floor go *outside* and those for the lid go *inside*. The 10cm x 18mm (4 x 3/4") overlaps 3.7cm (1 1/2") at each end, so that the lid fits. To make the front you will need 1.2m (4ft) lengths of 5 x 2.5cm (2 x 1") — one at each end and two in the middle, these are fixed 12.5cm (5") apart. Two 37cm (15") lengths are nailed above the entrance. You should have one 30cm (12") piece of 10cm x 18mm (4 x 3/4") left, and from this saw off two 12.7cm (5") lengths, and nail one to each side of the opening for the entrance tunnel.

Now drill a 12mm (1/2") hole with a brace and bit in the middle of the top board at the back, before nailing the 0.9m (3ft) lengths which will make the side, and which have to be nailed to the front and back: the bottom has to be nailed to all four or vice versa! This hole is necessary to take a ventilator, which can be made of a 2.5cm (1") pipe connector clipped to take two backnuts, and with a screwed elbow to fit on the outside. You should be able to obtain these pieces from a local ironmonger or plumber. It is useful to have a piece which is around 38cm (15"), so that there will be enough both inside the hedgehog's home and outside it. The end which is inside the house should be covered with 2.5cm (1")



mesh wire netting or perforated zinc. It is better if the hole is drilled in such a way that the pipe slopes downwards, so that it will drain any moisture from the hedgehog's house. The cover on the end of the pipe is necessary, because the hedgehog will bring in a great deal of debris, mainly leaves, which will fill the box. This would naturally block up the open hole.

All you need to do now is to place your box in a quiet part of your garden, but if you intend to do some hedgehog-watching, you will need to position the home in such a way that you can view it easily. The house needs to be camouflaged, and if you cover it with a sheet of polythene, ensuring that the ventilator is not obstructed, soil can be placed on top of this. You cannot be certain that hedgehogs will seek out what you might consider to be a 'desirable residence'. Nevertheless they might, especially if you place a piece of bacon rind inside your house to tempt them. You could also leave some hay outside so that if a hedgehog decides to move in, it will use this for bedding. The hedgehog will only take bedding if it is dry, so any which you leave, whilst being accessible, must also be covered.

This is likely to be a winter quarters for some lucky hedgehog. In the following spring it needs to be cleaned out and to some extent fumigated, during the summer, ready for the following winter. Put a piece of bacon rind into the entrance to see whether it disappears: if it doesn't this indicates that the hedgehog is no longer in residence, and you can clean the house out. Pyrethrum powder or one of the herbal dog dusting powders should be used to try and ensure that any 'livestock' are removed.