

Constructing Your Own Bug Hotel

Stage 1



The first thing to consider is the site of your bug hotel. This is not too crucial, but avoid building it in a dip in the land where water tends to collect after rainfall. It should be at least on an area of level ground, or better still with a piece of lower ground nearby. Additionally, depending on the climate, you may want to control the amount of sun it gets by thinking about the direction it will face (we have angled it so that the open side receives a small amount of morning sun, but nothing for the hotter part of the day).

The size is somewhat arbitrary, though as a guide the front trench in the photo is roughly 2 metres long, and 15cm deep. Once the basic pit is complete, digging a trench to a lower area of ground will produce a very effective drainage system. Of course the lowest point of the pit should be where this drainage trench joins it.

Stage 2



The next task is to create a frame using bamboo or something similarly flexible. It may be necessary to heat the bamboo over a fire before bending, and splitting the bamboo lengthways into quarters, sixths or eighths (depending on size) will make it far easier to work with. You will be able to use the sides of the pit to hold the bent bamboo in place and prevent it from straightening. Begin by creating the main arc at the front, lashing it to temporary stakes in the ground to ensure it cools/dries in the shape you want (this is at least a two person job!). Once this is in place, create a cage behind it using more strips, and lash them together to make it solid. For greater stability, you can sharpen the ends of the strips and push them into the ground.



In a day or so, this should be 'set', and the stakes can be removed. The next step is to create some kind of division to the front of your bug hotel. This is not essential, but it adds aesthetic value, and also offers additional stability to the frame. Set any vertical pieces into the ground to prevent them from becoming crooked with time, or during construction.



Stage 3



Now for the exciting part: fill your bug hotel! With one this size, this is a long job, and requires quite a lot of imagination. Try to use a wide range of natural materials, and incorporate lots of different sizes. This may include, but should by no means be limited to, sticks and twigs, leaf litter, different-sized tubes (bamboo and other grass is ideal for this), logs and bark. Invertebrates as a group will consume almost anything that has nutritional value, so there is plenty to choose from. If you are looking to encourage specific invertebrates, it is a good idea to research the kind of materials they might like.

An advantage of making such a large bug hotel is that it can contain big, bold features like large logs. If these logs are not at all rotten, it may be a good idea to use a drill to create holes going into them. This

vastly increases the volume of wood available to the insects in the short term.

Stage 4



Once the cage is packed, all that remains is to cover everything with earth. Before covering the drainage trench fill it with gravel or something similarly free-draining. This can then be covered along with everything else. Using poorly-drained soil, while rather laborious, is preferable for two reasons: firstly it will be better for keeping the inside dry, and secondly it will bind better to the cage, which means that in time as the interior decomposes

and needs replenishing, the dome of soil over the top stands a better chance of being self-supporting, making 'refilling' a much simpler process, and hopefully increasing the longevity of the roof. A useful tip is to wet the soil once it is in place then press it down, moulding it around the frame. A final layer of compost or topsoil will accelerate the colonisation process for plants. If there are any particular plants you want on top and around your bug hotel, this would be a good time to sow the seeds before anything too tenacious takes hold.

