

Land

Many synagogues/communities have land attached, be it a small garden, a burial ground, or a number of fields. As spaces that may well be visible to the wider public they are good opportunities to speak out through example. If your synagogue doesn't own land you may be able to apply some of these ideas to a local patch of ground.

Healthy biodiverse ecosystems are a precondition for the wellbeing of all species that live within them. Any system that is out-of-balance causes suffering and increases the risk of extinction. We can help to maintain biodiversity by preserving and creating the habitats that wildlife needs. The land could also be an ideal place for people to learn about biodiversity and conservation.

If your synagogue is old, it may well have land that has been little touched by modern management techniques – if so it's important to conserve the long-established habitats. Or you may only have a very small amount of land, perhaps mostly tarmaced. In this case, think about what changes you could make to create a space more attractive to wildlife. ([Quaker resource](#))

Synagogue land used for recreation/contemplation of local community

Note: could add some Jewish learning elements here for contemplation?

Land management - encouraging native wildlife and plants

- Trees and shrubs:
 - Could you plant more? If so, plant varieties that have value for birds, butterflies and other insects.
 - Native plants are best for wildlife.
 - Fruit and nut trees mean you will benefit from the produce.
 - If you have a lot of space could you plant a small wood, perhaps as a community project?
- Hedges:
 - Hedges are great for birds to nest in, particularly if you keep them thick.
 - Try to use native species.
- Flower beds:
 - Some are very good for insects.
 - You could plant flowers that can be used by the community. Plant herbs that community members can use
- Vegetable patch:
 - Could you plant a community vegetable patch?
- Walls, old stones and dead wood:
 - Leave these – they can be a haven for plants, insects and animals. Gravestones are similarly important for lichens and mosses, so you may choose not to clean them
- Paving and tarmac:

- Try to reduce the amount of paving and tarmac covering the land. It's not kind to wildlife and also means that rainwater cannot be absorbed into the ground. If you do need to have a solid surface try to make sure that there are spaces between stones for water to soak through.
- Make sure you provide access for everyone to enjoy your land: a well designed paved path can allow people who are unsteady on their feet or in wheelchairs to enjoy your land, and still allow rainwater to drain off.
- Grass:
 - Only mow regularly those areas that need mowing for access or amenity.
 - Try to leave some patches unmown to encourage meadow grasses and flowers.
- Compost heap:
 - Good for worms, spiders, slow worms and the garden.
 - <https://www.edenproject.com/learn/for-everyone/how-to-make-a-compost-heap-10-top-tips>
 - <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/compost-heaps>
- Go organic:
 - Don't use chemical pesticides, herbicides or fungicides.
 - Don't use peat – it is irreplaceable.
 - Install a water butt to collect rainwater
- Other ways of attracting wildlife:
 - Nesting boxes
 - Bird feeder and table
 - <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/nestboxes>
 - ([Quaker resource](#) - edited and resources added)

(what follows is [from Eco-church resource](#) - edited)

- Wildfire meadows:
 - It is worth doing a survey of your plants before thinking about sowing native wildflower seed. If you do sow seed, it is essential to get professional advice from your local wildlife trust first, so you sow the right flower mix.
 - Leaving some areas under long grass throughout the year provides shelter, food and overwintering sites for invertebrates and other small animals – eg frogs, lizards, field voles, etc. To prevent scrub invasion – and maintain the grass species – these areas should be divided into sections and a different section cut in autumn each year in rotation with the rest left uncut. Cuttings should be removed.
 - Meadows should be cut to a height of around 8cm roughly every three weeks through spring until the end of May. They should be left unmown until August/September, after which they should be cut, and the mowings left on the ground for a few days for the seed to fall out.
 - The 'hay' should then be removed and the ground trampled to push the seeds into the earth. Then they should be cut every three weeks with the removal of cuttings until end of October. This will reduce the fertility of the soil and encourage a greater diversity of wild flowers.

- This land can become a haven for plants and insects, often with nothing more complicated than changing the mowing regime
- Birds
 - Well-structured old hedges and more mature trees and shrubs are likely to be used by a variety of nesting birds. Churchyard habitats are also likely to provide an important food source for birds, including berries, seeds, insects and other invertebrates, and small mammals. Bird boxes come in all shapes and sizes for a variety of species. See the RSPB website for good info and suppliers of boxes.
 - Find out how to provide or make a nest-box [here](#) and find out which birds are likely to take up residence [here](#)
- Hedges and Trees
 - Some practical resources for caring for hedges (arc world resource):
 - [Caring for hedgerows](#)
 - [Inspecting and caring for trees](#)
 - [Practical management of trees and scrubs](#)
- Reptiles and amphibians
 - [Attracting amphibians from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)
 - [Slow Worms and Other Reptiles and Amphibians](#) (arc world resource)
- Small mammals
- Bees and insects
 - [How to attract bumblebees and ants](#) (arc world resource)
 - [Insects and minibeasts \(including how to build a bug hotel\)](#)
- Ponds
 - [How to build a wildlife pond](#)

Growing fruit and vegetables

Two potentially useful websites:

- <https://www.jewishfarmschool.org/>
- <https://seedmoney.org/>

Composting facilities

Composting is a process that helps organic matter to break down into a nutrient-rich, soil-like substance that is used in organic gardening. Food waste that is not composted ends up in landfills and releases methane gas, a potent greenhouse gas, as it decomposes. Nearly all organic matter (that is, plants, meat, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, flower stems, etc.) can be composted, but the actual items that are accepted at each composting facility may vary. The reason for this? Some materials need a lot of heat to break down, and a given composting site may not have enough volume to generate the necessary heat. Other compost sites are concerned about pests; although meat and fish are perfectly compostable, they also can attract unwanted animals, and so many sites stick to vegetables only. What are your options? If you have room on your property, starting a composting project can be a great educational opportunity for your community, and an extremely convenient way to compost your leftover food waste. However, you'll need someone (or a committee) to devote some energy to it. Alternately, you can bring your food waste to a public composting facility. This may be run by your local council. Many community-gardens offer public composting as well.

HOW TO START COMPOSTING AT YOUR INSTITUTION

- Evaluate: how much food waste is produced, and when?
- Find out if your institution would be willing to start composting on-site
- Recruit a committee to help you put your plan into action. You'll need to work on the infrastructure (or on a rotation schedule if you're bringing compost to a facility off-site), and on people's habits, getting them to remember to put food waste in a separate bin from trash.
- Use the following resources to help you build your compost heap:
 - <https://www.edenproject.com/learn/for-everyone/how-to-make-a-compost-heap-10-top-tips>
 - <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/compost-heaps>

Example from Altshul, an independent minyan in Park Slope, Brooklyn, has been composting since 2009:

One member of the team, Shuli Passow, told us about her experience: "Being part of a religious community that includes composting as part of its regular habits is deeply meaningful. It integrates one set of values into another, as my environmentalism finds new expression as a Jewish act, and my Jewish community encompasses a behavior that aligns with my personal commitment to environmental stewardship. This seemingly small practice of composting enables me to feel more full whole in my Judaism and more spiritually rooted in my work to connect with and care for the earth." Advice from the group's founder, Leah Koenig, on starting your own composting program: • Research your compost drop-off options. Gardens within walking distance are ideal. • Talk about the idea with your community to gauge interest, then recruit people to help you. Don't go at it alone! • If you can't compost right away, at least switch to compostable plates! It's a step in the right direction. This is how Altshul got started. (from [Hazon](#), p41/42, edited)

Encouraging community members to engage in wildlife friendly gardening and horticulture on its grounds

Like the building itself, any land you have access to is potentially an excellent place for community engagement and outreach work. Consider whether there is a local group that could benefit from using your land or that could help you to maintain and cultivate it. ([Quaker resource](#))