

Extra activities for people who want to be more proactive in their

Arks



The aim of the Ark is to create habitats and maximise the diversity and sanctuary available on your land. Some people may have the time and energy to strengthen the ecosystem services offered by their land. I have listed some ideas to start you off.

• **Wildlife pond**

If you can take the time and energy to install a small wildlife pond, do! It's a huge help and support to wildlife, second only to native trees. A small pond, even a sunken bowl filled with rainwater will create a watering hole for the small creatures and before you know it, newts, water beetles and tadpoles and dragonflies might find your Ark. (Just make sure it has rocks placed in it, above the waterline to allow creatures to escape if they are struggling with steep sides). Water is life and it is a vital component of any ecosystem support network. There are numerous websites dedicated to helping you position and build your own natural pond.

It would be best to fill the pond with harvested rainwater or spring water if possible. The chemicals in modern tap water kill bacteria and this is not a good thing for nature, or our own

gut ecosystem. Bacteria rule the world and the ‘good guys’ are vital for health in all ecological systems.

- **Log, twig and leaf pile.**

Throw a pile of logs somewhere quiet and create a log, twig and leaf pile if you can get hold of them. Lots of creatures will make homes here. Rotting wood and leaves create warmth for the families that take sanctuary here. They need safe places like this where they feel they are safe from predators and humans alike. Let the leaves in your garden fall where they want, as it feeds the plants that produced them and so many creatures need them for winter warmth.

They are the earth’s winter blanket, vital for the under-earth ecosystem.

- **Bees for life!**

WE NEED MORE BEES!

If you ever thought about keeping bees, now is the time to do it! Get a bee hive, preferably one that follows the guidelines of a natural beekeeper. Keep a hive simply to offer support to them, you don’t have to harvest their honey. Our job now is to support nature, not to take more than we need any more.

The Natural Beekeepers Trust in England is a great researching start point. I love sunhives and log hives up in the trees and so do the bees.

- **Bug hotel.**

This is a great way to encourage a range of insects and an easy and fun project to make.

Ensure the twig and stem holes are ranging between 2 and 10 mm in diameter and that the box is placed in a sunny spot at about 4 ft above ground.

- **A sand bank** is an important habitat for solitary bees. A bare sunny bank of soft sand that they can burrow into is another great project to help your Ark become a broader habitat for more families.

- **Dead hedges.**

These are stacks of tree and shrub prunings which are held in straight lines between wooden posts. A brilliant instant wind break and habitat for many creatures.

- **Get a look at who's come to stay!**

Set up a night vision, motion sensitive camera to catch sight of the families that take shelter in your Ark.

- **Grow your own food!**

The agricultural system we have become dependent on to produce our food has become the main destroyer of wild and natural habitats, driving the extinction of all life on earth. Step out of that system as much as you can, watch what you buy, grow vegetables, fruit, nuts and grains on part of your land. It is not the farmers that are to blame, it is the system they are caught in. This system will only change from the ground up.

Work with some of your land to grow chemical free food, if you are able. It is incredible how much food you can grow in a small space. If you can't manage this, then switch to buying food from local organic producers.

Polytunnels or glasshouses are also vital in many climates, to become more self-sufficient. I love forest gardening – growing perennial plants on multiple layers in an open canopy, productive woodland. Combined with native plants this is a magical way of working with land, mimicking nature's own natural systems. There are huge resources on the web on the

different forest garden plants for each region of the world.

Grow only from organic, heritage seeds and locally sourced open-pollinated seed. Support small organic seed companies and organisations such as **Seed Savers in Ireland**.

To protect and build soil, use the no-dig and permaculture methods of growing food in smaller spaces. When the soil is healthy, so is the food and everything else.

It's ALL about the soil.

Compost your leftover food.

Raw food into a **compost bin**, cooked food into a **wormery**. If you throw food in the general waste bin, it goes to landfill. Because it has no oxygen to help it decompose in the landfill, it results in the production of methane, a gas that is twenty times more destructive than carbon dioxide for the atmosphere when it is released. Instead put those nutrients right back into the soil system. Or, if you are lucky enough to have the room for some chickens, then the scraps are easily redistributed as tasty snacks which get processed into the best fertiliser when it comes out the other side!

- **Share and create a community.**

If you have a large garden, share some of the space for as many friends as possible to grow food, if they don't have a garden. The more of us that step out of the chemical dependent food system the better. Change will only happen if their profits fall. Share plants, knowledge, food and company. Just help each other. Give as much as you can back to nature to re-wild, at least half if possible and half to you and your friends to grow healthy food. Community allotments are so important for urban dwellers, we need to lobby for more and more land for

this purpose.

There's room in The Ark community for everyone!

- **Expand the web.**

Encourage your local council, government or Home Owners Association to become an Ark. There will be individuals in every organisation who understand that change is inevitable and that we must all increase our efforts to be part of the solution. This is designed to support them to do something very positive without much effort and you might be surprised at their willingness to be involved. It gives them a platform to reduce maintenance, save costs and be green. Nature doesn't care what their reasons are, as long as they do it!

- **Guerrilla gardening**

This is always an option for those more enthusiastic Ark builders. If there are wild areas on common land or industrial land that have been left to re-wild unintentionally, put one of our "This is an Ark" signposts in there and start a conversation. It may help encourage people or organisations not to destroy them later if they are blindly following a "tidy" mandate without the knowledge of how wild places provide homes for so much life. It might make them think twice and see the land has value when it is full of wildness. Remember, there will be people who are willing to embrace change.

They might surprise you.

- **Fast track ecosystem restoration.**

If you want to do more, and have the space to do it, you can begin to plant as many native and heritage fruit and nut trees as you can, if you can source local native stock. When a piece of land is being re-wilded, native tree seeds will most likely emerge from the earth once what

we call pioneer plants set the stage for them. These pioneers are the earliest plants to emerge to re-establish an ecosystem and they will create protected environments for the trees to grow at the right time. Birds and some other creatures such as squirrels will sow these seeds for us naturally in larger tracts of land. Nature already has every aspect of restoration worked out. If you don't have a huge amount of land, then a native mixed species hedgerow will be a huge benefit creating shelter, safe corridors and habitat for the families living on the land.

- **Tree planting.**

- Only plant tiny trees. Imagine you are adopting a child. The 'child' tree will settle in with ease and adapt much quicker, the younger it is. Otherwise newly planted trees often struggle, as they are generally raised in protected nursery environments, grown like soldiers with no character or resilience. It's often too much of a shock for the poor creatures when they meet wind, drought and new soil once they are moved to their new homes. In fact, I would highly suggest planting locally sourced tree seeds. Locally sourced plants are much more beneficial to the genetic diversity of the insects in your specific area.

If you do plant trees, you must nurture them as you would nurture a child. While they are young they need support for a few years to become strong and resilient 'adults'. So, mulch them to protect them and the soil and give them the best chance possible.

Here's how I do it.

Surround each one with a circle of cardboard, about 60 cm wide. (I use flattened cardboard boxes and make sure all tape is stripped and removed). Put a thick layer of mulch on top (bark mulch is one good option). Keep a little space around the tree trunk, don't pile against the trunk. Now add three rough field stones if you can get them. 50 cm in diameter approx.

These hold down the mulch, absorb the heat of the sun during the day, release it slowly at night and reduce root rock and hopefully removing the need for tree stakes. This creates a nursery microclimate to protect the trees and support them, the worms love the cardboard and start to aerate the soil and restore the micro-life establishment. The decomposing cardboard also returns carbon to the soil in the process.

In the future, when the trees grow, you may need to step in and thin the branches or coppice some trees to make sure more light gets through to the lower layers of the woods. This maximises the food and sanctuary available on that land. Otherwise it would eventually become a closed canopy and not much would live in its shade. We are the light holders now. We have removed the top predators from our land, the ones that would normally carry out this role and many others. Step in and provide whatever surrogate ecological services that are required to allow this system meet its full potential. On huge areas of land, this can be managed with the proper re-introduction of large animals. I love the large rewilding examples like *Knepp estate in England* and *Trees for life in Scotland*.

Then try and let the land lead the way, trust its intelligent processes.

Embrace this land into your world as another member of your family.

Nurture and protect it and all of the families that come to live there.