

And more to the point!

'I found him in the garden and he doesn't seem to be moving' said the lady as she deposited a large towel on the table. Lifting the edge of it with trepidation I spied a ball of spikes and realised there was a hedgehog beneath. Legolas, as he became to be known, had somehow got under the ladies gate into her garden onto her lawn but had no strength to go further. I could see blood discharging from somewhere in his curled up ball so we administered some gaseous anaesthetic and unrolled him. Unfortunately he had severe injuries to one of his legs and there was no option but amputation. However he was strong enough to survive the operation and a long period of recuperation at the surgery followed. He enjoyed his bowl of catfood every day but he was a shy fellow usually only appearing at night for his dinner, the rest of the time hiding in his make shift den. At last the day came for his release and it was a joy to see him snuffling his way across the garden to find a leafy plant he could hide beneath. He is now living in a walled garden, where he will be safe, not being as speedy as he used to be, and he is doing his bit by ensuring the slugs and snails are well controlled!

So what do we do if we find a hedgehog in our garden, or even worse find one in the street outside? It is important to try and conserve them as their numbers have significantly declined in recent years. This is thought to be due to a decline in areas suitable for them to live in, an increase in the use of garden pesticides and also an increase in numbers of their predators such as badgers. If you have found a hedgehog you are concerned about please use gardening gloves to collect it up, bring it indoors and put it in a high sided cardboard box with an old towel or fleece in the bottom for the hedgehog to hide under.

Fill a hot water bottle so that when it is wrapped in a towel there is a nice gentle heat coming through and put that in the bottom of the box with the hedgehog, ensuring it has room to get off the bottle and making sure the bottle is kept warm (if allowed to go cold it will do more harm than good). Put the box somewhere quiet.

Offer meaty cat or dog food and fresh water. If you are still concerned then it is best to contact someone who is knowledgeable about hedgehogs. Your Veterinary Surgeon may be able to advise you or you could contact the British hedgehog Preservation Society on 01584 890 801 for further advice and the numbers of local contacts.

Many people like the idea of having a hedgehog in their garden but they can travel up to 2 miles in a night, so to trap them in a smaller area, with no mate, and not enough natural food would be cruel. However you can try and tempt them in to your garden by ensuring there is easy access in by 13cm (5") square gaps at the bottom of boundaries. Put out meat based pet food, chopped unsalted peanuts, sunflower hearts and weetabix moistened with water. Offer fresh water to drink. It is a good idea to provide a feeding station for visiting hedgehogs so that cats and other animals don't steal the food. In the winter they will build themselves a nest and hibernate but they need to have enough bodily reserves to survive this period so should weigh at least 800g.

So keep your eye out for one of our prickly friends. They may need your help, and like Legolas, they will be very grateful!

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