



15 Ways to Start Improving Nature on Your Farm

1. Spend time observing what is on your land. **Create a map** showing different natural resources and infrastructure on your farm e.g. habitats and features, and even some of the more common species. Then maybe draw up **plan** and list key jobs you'd like to do over a period of a few years. Can you enlist the help of someone who knows about nature in the area and get their advice on what needs to be done on your farm (or options on what you might do). Consider all the seasons within that plan e.g. winter wildfowl, autumn berries, spring flowers, summer meadows etc.
2. A good starting point is to **retain** all the existing **natural habitats** on your farm such as hedgerows, woodland, ponds, wetlands etc and work towards improving their management for biodiversity and carbon capture.
3. For instance, hedgerows are great corridors but may need ongoing **repair**. Enhance your hedgerows by filling in gaps or 'leggy' areas with native trees and shrubs or by coppicing/laying what is already there.
4. If planting a new hedgerow, plan for a more **diverse** hedgerow with many different native trees and shrubs as well as wildflowers at the base. The more diverse the hedgerow, the more diverse the species that utilise it. If possible bank it like the old hedgerows; this creates more than one habitat.
5. Don't be too neat and tidy! Allow **hedgerows to mature and flower**, cut on a 2 or 3-year rotation, if at all. Cut under the crowns and as late in the cutting season as possible, between November and February. On roadsides, cut just the side protruding on to the road annually.
6. Similarly allow the hedgerow bases and other **field margins to flower and set seed** before cutting – this may require some fencing, consider 2m out, during the main flowering period (May-July).
7. If you are able to **create** some new habitats on your farm, remember that they are more likely to be colonised and used if they are close to, or connected to, existing habitats. Do not destroy an already functioning habitat to create another.
8. For instance, **create and manage a pond** for wildlife, choose a degraded wet area rather than one which is already supporting wetland wildlife.
9. Create a specific **native wildflower pollinator plot** for bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies so that there are always flowers in bloom between February and October.
10. Consider a **multispecies grassland**. Using many species means there are fewer bare patches and there are greater feeding and sheltering options for more insects and birds. Also, diverse pastures sequester more carbon.
11. Consider a more **low disturbance approach to your soil** – less ploughing, tilling to encourage your microbes and worms to increase.
12. **Reduce pesticide and herbicide inputs**; preferably cease. Avoiding spraying field margins, wetlands and other natural habitats.
13. **Do not spread slurry and fertilizers** on natural pastures, particularly in the vicinity of watercourses; they will kill many of the soil invertebrates and wild flowers. To prevent slurry, fertilizer and livestock run-off entering flowing water, fence off a 3-metre buffer strip for rivers, 2-metre for streams. These will still need to be cut or grazed in autumn to encourage a diverse growth.
14. **Reduce** or completely avoid the use of toxic **rodenticides**; these can inadvertently lead to the death of owls or other non-target species.
15. Considering **providing a sanctuary** for those key species you wish to attract to your farm. This could be in the form of beetle banks, earth banks for solitary bees, nesting cups for swallows and house martins, hibernation spots for bats, plant seed-bearing plots for yellowhammers, goldfinches and linnets, pile timber and dead leaves for insects and hedgehogs, leave long grass for moths and hares etc. There is much that can be done on farms for biodiversity but the key is to start somewhere! **Your neighbour** may look over the hedge and wonder what you are doing. **Why not get them involved?** Why not link up and work on creating a mosaic of habitats instead of islands of sanctuary.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS TO ADD TO THE ABOVE POINTERS, THEN PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO EMAIL US ON INFO@FARMINGFORNATURE.IE

Want more information?

We have detailed **how-do-to guides** coming soon on each of the following land types: grassland, field boundaries, tillage, peatland & heath, wetlands, and woodland. Each of these include steps you can take to enhance nature on your farm whether you just starting out or wish to explore further.