

## WILDLIFE FRIENDLY GARDENING

### Sharing your garden with blue tongues and other lizards

Steve Krinks

Reptiles are wonderful animals to have around your garden. They provide excellent pest control by eating snails and insects and are fascinating to watch as they go about their business. The Blue-Tongue's wary crawl and the tiny skink's frenzied games of chase and wrestle are little slices of wild life that can be enjoyed in most gardens.

To make your garden lizard-friendly there are a few simple things you can do. First of all, you need to provide a safe environment. Plenty of shelter is needed to give lizards places to sleep and hide from predators. Small lizards like skinks love ground cover, leaf litter and rock crevices. They love to bask in the sun so providing cover such as this near sunny spots is important. Larger lizards such as blue tongues need hollow logs, piles of wood, even clay pipes as shelter. They also require cover for when they move around the garden, so low-lying shrubs around fences are a great idea.

A safe environment also means no cats or dogs. Cats especially are a threat to lizards, and even a small scratch can lead to infection and death for native lizards. A blue tongue's only defence is its gaping mouth and alarming blue tongue, but an inquisitive cat can end its life with one swipe of a claw. Blue tongue babies (which are interesting in that they are born live) are especially vulnerable as they are virtually defenceless.



The Blue-tongue Lizard is a frequent visitor to many suburban backyards. Photo: John Blay

Another threat to blue tongues is snail bait. Eating a snail that has been poisoned will likely result in death for the unfortunate lizard. If you must use baits, keep them to areas not accessible to lizards. Blue tongues love strawberries – it may be that your patch is being raided by them and not snails or insect pests – so refrain from baiting around these plants. The same goes for insecticides – smaller lizards are also vulnerable to poisoning through eating contaminated insects.

Finally, the lawnmower is obviously not a fair match for a blue tongue! Before you mow or use a whipper snipper, walk the garden and check for blue tongues hiding in the grass. Don't expect them to get out of the way as their natural response is to lie low until the threat has passed.

Skinks are egg-layers, and there are things you can do to help look after their eggs when gardening. The eggs are small and rubbery, and are laid in batches of 2 to 6, although may sometimes be found in communal nests that can contain up to 250 eggs. If you disturb a nest whilst gardening, try to restore it to its original state. This is most likely to occur during the egg laying season from early summer to autumn.

Other lizards that you may encounter in your garden include geckos and dragons. Geckos are nocturnal and



The large, agile Eastern Water Dragons can be seen near waterways. Photo: John Blay

emerge at dusk to hunt for insects. They may choose to take up residence in outdoor structures such as sheds and garages. Dragons, such as the Eastern Water Dragon and Bearded Dragon are larger lizards, and are omnivorous, eating insects and some fruit. Water Dragons, as the name suggests, are found in proximity to water, and love sunning themselves on a rock by the water, which gives them a quick escape route should danger threaten.

We're lucky to have a good variety of these little characters living amongst us. With a little care, they will thrive in our gardens, protecting our plants from pests while providing us with a window into our reptilian past.

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