



**London Borough  
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# Nature Leaflet

**Dead Wood:  
full of living  
things**



Stag Beetle

## DEAD WOOD: full of living things

Once a tree dies or is cut down it is not the end of the trees contribution to life. Dead and dying trees are essential for many other forms of wildlife.

Lots of insects, plants, birds and mammals rely on dead or dying trees, logs and branches for their survival.

Many species rely on dead wood for food or shelter therefore dead timber is one of the most important habitats for wildlife in Britain today.

Approximately a tenth of all British invertebrates spend all or part of their lives in dead wood.

Dead wood is important in all its forms, a standing dead tree, an older living tree with dead branches and rotting heartwood to tiny twigs fallen to the woodland floor, all contribute to sustaining wildlife.

Each deadwood community will differ according to the species of tree, how big the piece of timber, how damp the wood is, and how much light the material gets. The general rule is that the bigger the piece of timber the better as it rots slower giving more time for colonisation.

### Birds and Mammals

Some of the birds and mammals that rely on dead wood include Woodpeckers and bats which roost and breed in cavities and holes in trees. For Woodpeckers, dead wood is vital as they feed on insects inside it, make their nest holes in it and even use it to woo their mates by using it as a sounding board and drumming on it.



Grey-Spotted  
Woodpecker



Nathusius' Pipistrelle



Fungi

### Fungi

Fungi are an important group of organisms because they help to process dead plant and animal matter through decomposition, breaking it down into basic elements that are returned to the soil. Unlike plants, they cannot make their own food so many species obtain food from dead and rotting wood. The fungus you see is normally only the fruiting body - the equivalent to the apple on the tree. The main body of a fungus is generally made up of many tiny filaments called hyphae, which form the body, known as mycelium, that are hidden within whatever the fungus is growing on. It is this part of the fungus that is active in the process of decay as it spreads through the dead wood. Fungi are considered to be more important than invertebrates in their role in the decomposition process. There are around 4,000 species in Britain.

### Invertebrates

Worms, snails, copepods, millipedes, centipedes, spiders and a number of other insects depend on dead wood at some stage of their life cycle. Dead wood is also the environment for the immature stages of insect life ie eggs, larva and pupa.

Buried timber is the preferred habitat of the Stag beetle, their larvae spend up to seven years inside the wood.

### What to do in your garden

If you want to attract wildlife into your garden you can create your own dead timber piles. Dead timber in semi-shade is best, but do keep some in full sunlight and some in full shade to benefit as many animals as possible, you can drill your own entrance holes into dead timber to encourage insects and don't forget to bury some wood out of full sunlight to create an environment for Stag Beetles.