

Confined to the garden. Week 2: all about the hogs.

Week 2 of the coronavirus 'lockdown', I've had more than enough of looking at a laptop screen so it's time for an outdoor project. I'm going to construct a new and improved Hedgehog feeding station. There are loads of designs for feeding stations available online, most are variations of one of these:

BHPS: <https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Feeding-Station.pdf>

RSPB: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/openahedgehogcafe/>

I started out with a much simpler design than I have now, but it had to evolve to stay exclusively for the hogs. I followed advice from the internet: "Place one brick on top of the box to prevent it from being easily moved and another approx. 13cm (5") away from the entrance to stop larger mammals being able to lie down and hook the food out with their paws."

I laid out the buffet, thinking this canteen would be exclusively for Hedgehogs only. This was not the case. Cats kept getting in to steal the food, and a particularly flexible young fox was so determined to reach the food that he still got in, even when the cats had given up long ago. First, I put the box up against a wall to keep it from being pushed across the patio. Not enough. I made a longer entrance tunnel out of bricks. The fox wriggled in on his belly. Then I used some planters to give the tunnel a ninety-degree turn. No problem, he just laid on his side to get his paws around the corner. I kept making the entrance tunnel longer and narrower, but he still wriggled in.



Eventually, with two ninety-degree bends in the entrance tunnel and the opening made much smaller, the Hedgehogs got to eat their meals in peace, or at least they didn't have to share with the fox!



I have been using plastic storage boxes so that I can watch the Hedgehogs inside the feeding station, but they degrade with exposure to light and cold. When the box in the pictures above became brittle and started to break up, I replaced it with a larger one.



This too has now begun to crack. Rather than continue replacing plastic, I'm going to construct something a bit more durable. I still want to be able to see the Hedgehogs inside and it must keep the food dry as well as keeping foxes out. After a quick rummage around I've come up with some materials left over from previous projects.



(Never throw anything away, you never know when it might be useful!)

This feeding station will be enclosed with wire mesh at the front. This should mean the camera trap will capture the action inside much better. The sensors trigger the camera when an object is both moving and warmer than its surroundings. It can't pick up a Hedgehog's heat through the plastic, so the camera tends to switch off when they go inside and come back on when they leave. The mesh will allow the sensors to trigger the camera when a Hedgehog moves inside so I won't miss the action when squabbles break out over the food bowls. Wire mesh won't keep the rain off the food

though, so I'm using a bit of leftover pond liner to create a waterproof roof. No-one likes a soggy dinner!



Like most things I make, it's more functional than pretty, but it should do the job. There's a little bit less space inside for the food bowls, but I should now be able to capture video of the Hedgehogs eating. Even better, no more plastic going to landfill!



Check back here next week to see if the Hedgehogs like it.

I've created a new YouTube channel to share some of the videos from 'Hogcam'. You can see them here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg7gSnXpjeo85XqoY35hTwg/>

My favourite bit of Hedgehog antics from this week was seeing one of them swimming across the pond after being pushed in by another hog.



Apologies for poor picture quality!

Click here for a short video of this incident: <https://youtu.be/xk8Mtjdo9xl>

They can be quite aggressive with each other, especially around the breeding season. I often see them pushing and shoving others around. You can see an example of this behaviour in a video from my garden here: <https://youtu.be/WjhAoYd8g3E>

So, I guess it's back to the laptop for a while for me, but I'll be back out in the garden soon. Check back here next week for more videos, and to see what else is happening in my garden.