

When hedgehogs really do need help

As winter gets underway, many walkers and gardeners come across a little, prickly creature: the hedgehog. Fearing that the hedgehogs could not survive winter on their own, many people gather the animals up and want to look after them over winter. However, in many cases this level of care is excessive and also not allowed. Our hedgehogs are specially protected wild animals and should not be kept in captivity. The only exception to this are animals in need of help only until they are capable of surviving in their natural environment once again. Vets from the specialist retail chain, Fressnapf, can explain just when the prickly little animals really do rely on outside for help.

Injured and ill hedgehogs, as well as young hedgehogs that have not achieved a weight of 600 g required to survive hibernation, need the help of an animal lover. You can tell that a hedgehog is weak if it is stumbling around awkwardly in broad daylight, appears apathetic, is making a snoring sound when breathing or looks thin and gaunt. Animals that are trapped by snow cover or are out and about very early on in spring also need help. You should put these animals in a deep box and take them to the nearest hedgehog rescue centre or vet since all hedgehogs are infested with

PET POINTERS



with Tony Cross

parasites and this is the first thing that has to be treated.

To prevent the onset of hypothermia, you should provide the hedgehog with a hot water bottle at a temperature of about 35 degrees and place it in the box next to the animal. You might also find a hedgehog nest containing baby hedgehogs. Just keep an eye on it at first before starting to worry - perhaps the mother is on her way back. You should not feed ill and young animals in distress. Since the correct

type of food depends on the age of the animal, it is imperative that you seek advice from hedgehog rescue or a vet in the case of young animals. You can feed adult animals with, for example, wet cat food, cooked egg yolk, meal worms or special prepared hedgehog food. Important: hedgehogs drink water; never offer them milk under any circumstances!

"Hedgehogs are nocturnal mammals. The breeding season lasts from April to September, so there are also still extremely late litters being born in October that stand a very poor chance of surviving without help. The animals then need a further six weeks or so before they can fend for themselves," explains Fressnapf vet, Dr. Lioba Schaetz. Every year, from October/November time when the temperature drops, hedgehogs hibernate through until March/April. During this time their body temperature falls from 35 degrees right down to below 5 degrees. Before hibernating they eat to substantially

NATURAL, WILD GARDENS - THE BEST PLACE FOR A HEDGEHOG

We can help the majority of hedgehogs by creating a natural habitat for them to dwell in. Excessively well tended gardens cleared of all leaves and twigs leave our little prickly-backed friends nowhere to hide away. Snail, insect and weed killers are harmful to hedgehogs and deny them the source of their basic diet. Therefore, anybody who wants to do something for these sweet little animals will delay clearing up the garden before winter: piles of leaves, cut branches, heaps of twigs or compost, as well as low shrubbery, all make ideal places for hibernation.



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