**Pumpkin dumping a scary threat to wildlife this Halloween, warns the Woodland Trust**

Images: <https://thewoodlandtrust.sharefile.eu/d-sbb8feea722034907a944ad7051aab97e>

**With Halloween looming the Woodland Trust has issued an urgent plea to witches, wizards and spooks everywhere not to endanger wildlife by dumping pumpkins in woodland.**

The UK’s largest woodland conservation charity has spotted a worrying trend in recent years for Halloween pumpkins to be taken to the nearest wood and left, in a well-meaning but misguided attempt, to provide food for birds and woodland creatures.

“A myth seems to have built up that leaving pumpkins in woods helps wildlife. People think they’re doing a good thing by not binning them in landfill and instead leaving them for nature” explained Paul Bunton, Engagement and Communication Officer at Woodland Trust.

“But pumpkin flesh can be dangerous for hedgehogs, attracts colonies of rats and also has a really detrimental effect on woodland soils, plants and fungi. We can’t leave dumped pumpkins to rot so we end up with an orange mushy mess to deal with at many of our sites.”

The Woodland Trust [has tips on its website](https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/10/what-to-do-with-pumpkins/) on how spooky leftovers can be best used,

including making a pumpkin birdfeeder for the garden, which should be kept high off the ground well away from hedgehogs.

Trevor Weeks from East Sussex Wildlife Rescue and Ambulance Service echoed the Trust’s concern over the risk to hedgehogs because, like other wildlife “they are opportunistic eaters and they spend autumn and early winter building up their fat reserves for hibernation”.

“As a result, hedgehogs can gorge themselves on easily available food like dumped pumpkins,” Weeks added. “Although not toxic to them the fleshy fibrous fruit can cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea as they are not designed to eat large quantities of fruit.

“This can lead to them becoming bloated and dangerously dehydrated which in turn can be fatal. At this time of year, they can’t afford to become ill, or they may not survive the winter hibernation.”

According to the Trust, which owns and cares for more than 1,000 free-to-visit woods across the UK, the pumpkin problem seems to be starting earlier and earlier, with supermarkets flooded with cheap pumpkins for sale and pumpkin-picking growing in popularity as a family activity in the run-up to Halloween.

Paul continued: "Thousands of tonnes of pumpkin gets thrown away in the UK after Halloween each year, so it would be great if we could all put that to better use.”

He added: “Jack-o-lanterns can be good for wildlife in small quantities in gardens, but not woodland or other countryside. We are urging people everywhere to make soup, make a birdfeeder for your garden, but please don’t make a mess of the countryside!”

The Woodland Trust’s ***Love Your Woods*** campaign encourages people to enjoy their visit while helping protect woods and nature for the future.

Visitors can play their part by following some simple advice, including staying fire-free, staying on paths, taking dog mess and litter home and protecting wildlife by keeping dogs close.

**Notes to Editors**

For more information please contact Ruby Harrison or Owen Phillips at the Woodland Trust press office on 01476 602993 or email media@woodlandtrust.org.uk, rubyharrison@woodlandtrust.org.uk or owenphillips@woodlandtrust.org.uk

**Love Your Woods** [Love your woods - Woodland Trust](https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/love-your-woods/)

Woodland Trust sites are free to enter and open all year round so come prepared for nature in its natural state. This means no toilets, cafés, bins or cleaning staff - just unmissable views, clean air, birdsong and woodland paths for you to wander along to your heart’s content. You can help protect woods and nature for the future by following these top tips for your visit:

* Stay on the paths
* Take dog mess and litter home with you
* Protect wildlife by keeping dogs close
* Stay fire free
* Leave sleepovers to the wildlife
* Be considerate with den building
* Park with consideration for others
* Swimming is for wildlife only
* Woods aren’t good for rock climbing which destroys precious habitats
* Check access rules before cycling

**Green Recovery Challenge Fund**

Love Your Woods is part of The Woodland Trust’s ‘People and woods: getting better together’, funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

**The Woodland Trust**

The Woodland Trust is the largest woodland conservation charity in the UK with more than 500,000 supporters. It wants to see a UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife.

Established in 1972, the Woodland Trust now has more than 1,000 sites in its care covering approximately 29,000 hectares. Access to its woods is free so everyone can benefit from woods and trees.

The Trust has three key aims:

* protect ancient woodland, which is rare, unique and irreplaceable
* restoration of damaged ancient woodland, bringing precious pieces of our natural history back to life

establish native trees and woods with the aim of creating resilient landscapes for people and wildlife