- So a cocktail of multiple chemicals can become available in soil to non-target species e.g.: Insects, worms, slugs, beetles that are vital for healthy soil. These are in turn eaten by all kinds of other species such as hedgehogs and birds
- Water-soluble chemicals don't stay put in garden soil – they travel – dispersed through soil by water. Applications to paving, patios and paths run off into soil and water systems. So pesticides end up in groundwater and local streams and rivers poisoning non-target aquatic animals and plants.
- Pesticides in ground water are taken up and accumulate in plants, particularly shrubs & trees, becoming available to more non-target species through sap and the nectar in flowers. A study from the University of Sussex showed that trees that have not been treated with pesticides can contain higher concentrations of toxic chemicals than plants that have been treated directly. In this way pesticides become integrated with the nutrient cycle that feeds our garden plants and wildlife
- As well as the consequences for nature, we pay directly for pesticide pollution through our water bills. The cost of removing toxic chemicals from drinking water is estimated to be up to £200 million a year in the UK. But we cannot be sure of the efficiency of water treatment. Water companies admit that the acutely toxic common slug treatment metaldehide, can't be removed from drinking water. We don't know how efficiently other chemicals are being removed
- The majority of garden plants and bulbs purchased from non-organic growing systems are treated with neonicotinoid drenches. After planting the chemicals leach into soil and are available to all kinds of insect visitors as plants grow. Organically grown plants and bulbs aren't much more expensive. We found 50 Narcissus Brakenhurst bulbs priced around £35 from an organic grower (www.naturalbulbs.co.uk) and around £30 from a non-organic grower

Pesticide manufacture is a multi-billion pound industry but it's a dirty industry, contributing to climate breakdown through chemical manufacturing as well as air and environmental pollution. The EU recently published targets to reduce use of the most toxic pesticides. It will take time for agriculture to adjust but do we really need them in gardens?

Our wildlife is disappearing at an alarming rate, stressed by a combination of habitat loss and environmental toxins and climate breakdown is speeding the decline. But we are dependent upon wildlife for so called ecosystem services – for pollination, clean air and water filtration, and critically, healthy soil – we depend upon biodiversity for our food security.

Ultimately we have to weigh perceived benefits of using pesticides against the true costs of allowing lethal toxins to escape into the local and wider environment.

Preventing Bird Diseases

As the days shorten and temperatures begin to drop many of us fill bird feeders and baths to enjoy the rewards of watching our feathered visitors. Garden birds rely on feeders when it gets really cold and some species such as the Goldfinch have seen steady increases in populations, experts think largely due to feeders. The Greenfinch, has not done so well suffering with the parasitic Trichomonosis disease which has caused their numbers to plummet in recent years. To fight the spread of this and other bacterial bird infections it is vital to clean bird feeders and baths regularly, at least once a month, dependant on the number of visitors. Wearing rubber gloves, wash out feeders with warm water - outside. The RSPB recommend 5% disinfectant or vinegar solution.

Scrub to remove all dirt and debris then rinse with clean water. Let the feeder dry before refilling. The solution can be used to clean bird baths too. Check peanuts and don't put out mouldy nuts that have been stored for too long as they might contain Aflatoxins. These micro organisms are extremely poisonous to birds and can prove fatal. It is also important to clean the area around the bird feeder or if possible move it's position monthly to prevent a build up of harmful bacteria around the site. Don't forget you can record any interesting visitors to your bird feeders in the Shutford Nature Hub in the phone box.

Shutford Nature Hub