



**wildlife
watch**



Buckets 4 Beetles

Stag beetles lay eggs underground near rotting wood. The larvae of these insects live in the wood for up to five years, before pupating to become adults. Help protect this endangered species by making a simple habitat for them.

All you need is a strong plastic bucket with or without a handle, an adult with a tool for making holes in it, some woodchip, some soil and finally, lots of patience.



First, take the bucket and make holes of at least 30mm in diameter (to allow the adult female beetles to pass through) at intervals all around the bucket with about 50mm between each hole. Then make a second and third row of holes allowing at least 50mm between rows. The picture shows a craft knife being used, but we think using a circular cutter is much safer.

On the bottom of the bucket make a series of drainage holes, about six in all, in a circular pattern. Place several large stones in the bottom of the bucket and then fill it with a mixture of one quarter soil from your garden and three-quarters woodchip. Make sure the two are well mixed together. (Woodchip from hardwood, which you can make from old wood in your garden, is preferable. However, if only softwood chippings, such as those bought from pet stores, are available, it is preferable to use these rather than not bury a bucket at all).

Dig a hole in your garden somewhere that is quiet and out of sight, making sure it is deep enough to get the whole bucket in just leaving the handle visible. Fill in any gaps around the edge with soil but do not pack it too tightly. The woodchip will begin rotting down and, as it does the bucket will become an increasingly attractive egg-laying site to any female stag beetles that happen to be in the vicinity. You will need to check the bucket every month to ensure that it is always full of mixture. As the chippings rot, the level will fall so you will need to top it up from time to time. To do this, use a mix of half woodchip and half soil.



Once your bucket has been buried for at least a year you can dig it up and tip the contents carefully onto a plastic sheet nearby where you can examine them and look for any larvae. Sift through the contents systematically and record all you see, comparing any larvae to our website guide so that you can work out what has been living in your bucket. Then put everything back into the bucket carefully, refill if necessary and re-bury in the garden so that the larvae can carry on growing into adults.

Visit the school's website for more information on stag beetles, including a guide to different types of larvae: <http://hookinfants.co.uk/clubs.php> and click the **Wild Things** article at the bottom of the page.