

The hedgehog (3)

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Hedgehogs are one of the best known creatures found in our gardens and they have been with us for many centuries. The Latin name is erinaceous, so Erin would be an excellent name for a hedgehog. They get their name from the grunting noise they make as they look for food in the hedgerows.



Hedgehogs are the only British mammal with spines, which are very useful as protection against predators such as foxes. Each spine is between 2 and 3 centimetres in length. They are hollow and last about a year before dropping out and being replaced. When faced with an enemy a hedgehog will roll up into a tight ball, tighten its muscles causing the sharp spines to be raised and making it almost impossible to attack. Sometimes they cover their spines with saliva, but no-one knows the reason for this. They also have up to 500 fleas, which rarely bite humans.

Sleeping during most of the day and foraging for food at night means that hedgehogs are nocturnal animals. Their eyesight is weak and they rely on their sense of smell and hearing to find food. Small creatures such as insects, worms and snails are favourite foods but they have also been known to eat birds' eggs, mice, frogs and even small snakes. This makes them a favourite with gardeners as they eat many of the creatures that would otherwise eat the gardener's plants. They travel quite long distances in search of food; up to 3 kilometres a night.

Hedgehogs usually hibernate during the winter months, when their heartbeat can drop from about 190 beats to 20 beats per minute. This conserves energy, but is not the same as just going to sleep. It means that the hedgehog can survive through the winter when there is little food to be found. It is very important that they make a good nest of leaves, grass, straw, reeds etc as insulation against the cold. The nest can often be found under hedges and roots of trees and even in compost heaps.

The young are born from May onwards and up to eleven babies, or hoglets, can be born at one time. They are born blind and rely on their mother to provide milk for the first six or seven weeks of their lives. They then set off on their own to find food and shelter.



The collective name for hedgehogs is an array. Hedgehogs used to be quite common in our gardens, but there are far fewer of them today and they are considered an endangered species. There are two things in particular that humans do that have a bad effect on hedgehogs. One is to put slug pellets on the garden. The second is to try and feed them with milk, as they are lactose intolerant.

Name:



Questions:

1. What is the Latin name for a hedgehog?

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2. Describe a hedgehog's spines and how they can be used for protection.

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3. Describe how hedgehogs search for food and what types of food they eat.

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4. Why is hibernating in winter important for hedgehogs?

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5. What do hoglets live on for the first few weeks of their lives?

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6. Why do gardeners like hedgehogs?.....

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7. Hedgehogs are now an endangered species. What could we do to help increase the number of
hedgehogs?

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8. Use a dictionary to help find the meanings of the following words as used in the passage:

lactose intolerant:

insulation:

Name:



Answers

1. The Latin name for a hedgehog is erinaceous.
2. A description a hedgehog's spines and how they can be used for protection.
3. A description of how hedgehogs search for food and what types of food they eat.
4. Hibernating in winter is important for hedgehogs so that they can survive when there is little food to eat.
5. During the first few weeks of their lives hoglets live on their mother's milk.
6. Gardeners like hedgehogs because it is thought that they eat many of the creatures that eat garden flowers and shrubs.
7. Any sensible answer.
8. lactose intolerant: a digestive problem; the inability to digest lactose, a sugar found in milk.

insulation: covering something to stop heat from escaping