

# HOW TO HAVE COMPANY GROUNDS CLOSE TO NATURE





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# THE LIFE PROJECT ECONOMY & NATURE LOWER AUSTRIA

Biodiversity, also called biological diversity, is a nature portfolio which comprises habitats and species plus their genetic variations. It is like a life insurance meant for current and future generations. It affects us all. Companies also depend on an intact planet since all economic processes either directly require ecological resources or depend on their existence. Many companies are already engaged in environmental issues. Preservation and sustainable use of biological diversity has become an increasingly important topic. This is why companies need to consider by which measures they might be able to counteract the current crisis of biodiversity since this crisis is one of the greatest challenges that impede sustainable development.



The goal of the **EU LIFE Project “Economy & Nature Lower Austria”** is to raise awareness of biodiversity factors and the services which our ecosystem offers and to motivate companies in Lower Austria to implement projects and activities that preserve biodiversity. A lot is already being done by local enterprises. Their involvement ought to be made visible in order to inspire others to also become active “right at their doorsteps.”

This project is implemented by eNu (Agency for Energy and Environment Lower Austria) in cooperation with the Environment Holding Organisation and the Biosphere Park Wienerwald Management Ltd. Funding and expert support also come from the departments of Nature Preservation, Economy, Tourism, and Technology in Lower Austria. The nature reserves as well as nature protection groups and the Federal Economic Chamber Lower Austria are major partners.



## THE BASIC CONCEPT

Economical steps of production are certainly a hallmark of any company. But a close-to-nature setup of company premises does not necessarily jeopardize this goal. Colourful, blooming meadows instead of immaculate lawns; wild hedges with a variety of blossoms instead of straight-cut common privet hedges, a parking lot adorned by local trees instead of a concrete desert leading up to the entrance – simple measures such as these can turn your company grounds into special habitats made for man and nature. This brochure presents to you specific examples of how easily such projects can be implemented. It promotes nature on company premises, makes a clear statement in behalf of sustainability and demonstrates the advantages that such a course will have in store both for nature and your company.

There are many reasons why you should begin to align company grounds to close-to-nature settings. Whether planning new headquarters or just wanting to increase the value of your current premises, whether starting on a small scale or going full throttle: each company has numerous choices of how to achieve nature-friendly company grounds.

### **There are many arguments why it is desirable to have company premises close to nature:**

#### **The cost factor: Nature pays off impressively**

Maintaining and cultivating close-to-nature company grounds is, in most cases, less costly and time consuming than conventional lawns or hedges. By planting indigenous shrubbery, preferring meadows to prefabricated turf and by planting plants at minimal distances from each other in order to stifle weed growth you can save money right from the beginning. Maintenance will also be cheaper because you do not have to spend multiple times a year mowing the lawn or cutting the hedges, thus lowering the cost of upkeep.

#### **The ecological argument: Nature provides "services"**

Nature-friendly company grounds can provide habitats for many species of flora and fauna and can even trigger off networks of biotopes. On cultivated soil, bats, dragonflies, various butterflies and wild bees nowadays rarely ever find suitable habitats. Plant species native to poor grasslands, brown fields, or pond banks are also in need for substitute habitats.

In addition, close-to-nature areas contribute to the protection of the environment by being like natural sieves that help regulate the influx of rain water, thus mitigating weather extremes. Moreover, natural evaporation on company grounds leads to a pleasant climate, especially in summer.

### The social argument: Nature energizes

Customers, business partners, colleagues – all of these will discover that natural surroundings best help people to relax and recover. They support creativity, promote well-being and raise productivity. Close-to-nature company grounds provide a harmonic and productive work atmosphere which is also ideal for successful and pleasant meetings with customers. Think of the creation of such an environment as a mutual effort and as a team building endeavour with your employees. Put up dry stone walls or jointly cultivate bushes and meadows from time to time.

### Nature as a “business card” showing your involvement

By creating company grounds close to nature, enterprises can make a valuable contribution to securing biodiversity (which in itself is the basis of all forms of life). Such an involvement and such a course of action credibly demonstrate your social responsibility. Nature on company grounds is like a business card that demonstrates visibly a mindset of assuming responsibility and promoting sustainability not only for the environment, but for future generations as well.

## PRINCIPLES

At the planning stage of company sites, people often focus on the buildings only. Rarely the surroundings or the ecosystem services are taken into consideration. When planning company premises, the **following** criteria **should** be taken into account in order to guarantee biodiversity.

- How to minimize soil sealing
- How to retain rainwater
- How to create and keep special sites low in nutrients
- How to plant a diversity of suitable indigenous plants
- How to avoid the use of peat, pesticides, and artificial fertilizers
- How to foster diversity
- How to leave room for “wild” areas

## BUILDING BLOCKS

You will find a great number of concepts regarding close-to-nature company premises because the requirements of each industrial area are quite unique. You might consider the following elements while planning nature-friendly company premises:

1. Roads come alive
2. Seepage basins and filtration channels
3. Nature-friendly entrance areas
4. Local species instead of imports
5. Hedges of wild shrubbery and bushes
6. Habitats on unutilised areas
7. Habitats for bats & co.
8. Field borders & slopes turned into habitats
9. Facade greening
10. Green roofs
11. Open areas for man and nature
12. Insect friendly lighting



# ROADS AND STORAGE AREAS COME ALIVE

Every company needs roads and storage areas. Colourful meadows and blossoming trees are not only an asset for flora and fauna, they also contribute to the well-being of your staff.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Open areas offer room for spontaneous growth of vegetation. The plants and herbs that sprout there are the ones that can take being stepped on or driven over.
- Such areas provide habitats for rare plants which thrive on sunshine and warmth.
- Transport, storage and handling areas built close to nature can also provide habitats and hideouts, thus avoiding fragmentation of the countryside.
- Preventing soil sealing keeps natural water cycles intact.
- Because of their natural evaporation powers such areas have a positive effect on plant growth and the microclimate.

## Advantages for your company:



- Nature-friendly transport, storage and handling areas may be less costly to build and maintain than asphalt roads.
- Depending on their function and the frequency of usage, different surfaces can be chosen from. These will form creative and appealing designs of your premises.
- Extreme rainfalls will have less negative impact since there is less strain on the sewer system.
- Nature-friendly building styles have a natural cooling effect due to their evaporative powers.



# WATER

Close-to-nature draining systems provide valuable, indispensable habitats for wet-dry shrubbery and grasses as well as for frogs and newts. In addition, local drainage of rain water helps refill groundwater supplies and constitutes a means of flood prevention.



## Advantages for nature and the environment.



- The periodic drying up of seepage basins leads to a variety of plant communities.
- Highly porous basins attract a wide range of plants, such as the purple loosestrife or the mullein.
- Such a rich flora with its manifold blossoms, structures, and seeds feeds insects, birds, and small mammals.
- Apart from these positive functions for the habitat, drainage systems also serve as stepping stones in the landscape and as important components within the network of biotopes.
- Professionally built seepage beds are natural filters of rainwater.

## Advantages for your company:



- A nature-friendly design is inexpensive to build and maintain.
- Close-to-nature designs are less costly than conventional rain water management systems.
- Due to evaporation, direct draining contributes to a pleasant climate on company grounds.
- Seepage beds where bulrushes and reeds grow need to be mowed only once a year.

# LIVING ENTRANCE AREAS

Entrance areas reflect your company style. Ecological planning does not only benefit nature. Your entrance area will be like a pretty business card that highlights your commitment to nature.

MIGROS



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Because it is built of natural material (like wood and stone) an entrance area designed close-to-nature forms a microhabitat.
- Wet areas like ponds or streams create appealing features for plants, insects, and birds.
- Dry areas can provide habitats for xerophilous animals and plants (species which prefer dry zones).
- Local aromatic plants (sage, camomile, mint) provide essential nutrients for insects and for quite a number of birds.
- Rare plants such as camomile, corn poppy, and corn-flower can find new homes in such habitats and add colour to your premises.
- Structural diversity based on a mosaic of meadows, shrubbery, and bushes creates a diversity of habitats.

## Advantages for your company:



- Entrance areas built close to nature testify of the ecological mindset of your company.
- Within minute areas, they provide experiences with nature for staff and customers alike.
- Professionally built close-to-nature entrance areas require only little maintenance work.
- Herb beds full of medicinal plants or spices are not only decorative, but can also be used in the cafeteria or company kitchen.

# LOCAL TREES

Indigenous trees and bushes provide shade, embellish roadsides, adorn the entrance area, grace your façade, provide fruit and are habitats and a source of food to many species.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Local trees and shrubbery provide precious habitats for uncountable species of birds, insects, and mammals like squirrels and bats.
- The older a tree, the more retreat it offers and the more animals can find refuge there.
- By mounting nesting boxes on trees you can support birds and bats.
- Trees and bushes have a vital function as connectors between habitats.
- They serve as shelter-belts against wind or emissions, provide visual protection and serve as noise barriers.

## Advantages for your company:



- Trees are an economic option for various open space designs.
- Trees also function as filters of particulate matter, as wind barriers, or visual barriers.
- By supplying shade and cooling, they provide a more comfortable climate within the company building.



# MEADOW HABITATS

Some companies have immaculate lawns on their company premises to divide areas. These, however, need constant care. Natural flowery meadows only need to be mowed once a year, are beautiful to look at and form indispensable habitats for numerous living beings.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- In highly developed, built-up areas, meadows constitute crucial habitats for manifold species.
- After setting up such meadows, the results will show quickly.
- "Wild corners" are meadow areas that are not mowed as frequently as others. They provide structural diversity and are a great refuge and a habitat for many insects.

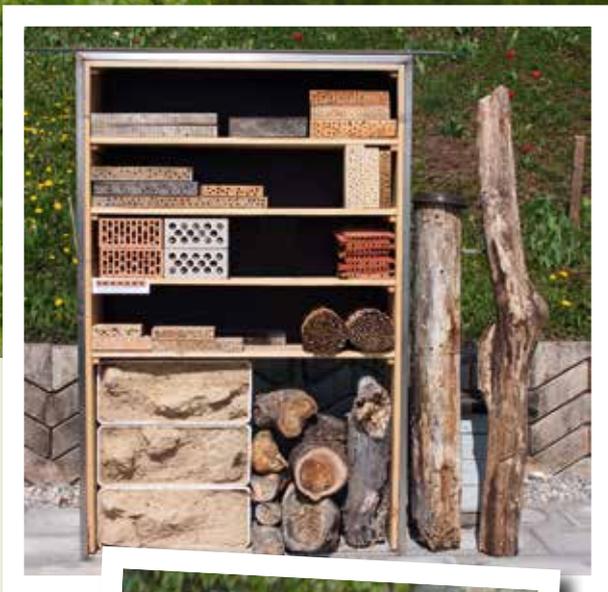
## Advantages for your company:



- Habitats on uncultivated soil offer greater latitude while planning company premises. They also offer co-workers rich nature experiences while at the same time being optically pleasing.
- The cost of setting up and maintenance is low when compared to grassy areas that have to be mowed regularly.

# BAT & CO HABITATS

In densely populated areas, suitable habitats for the local fauna are rare. By mounting nesting boxes for birds or bats and placing woodpiles or heaps of dry leaves on company premises, you can create substitute habitats for many animals.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Uncultivated areas on company grounds left to be freely taken over by nature as well as active measures taken in behalf of the local fauna (by installing nesting boxes and feeding stations for example) contribute immensely to species protection. Insects, birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians profit immeasurably from such steps taken.

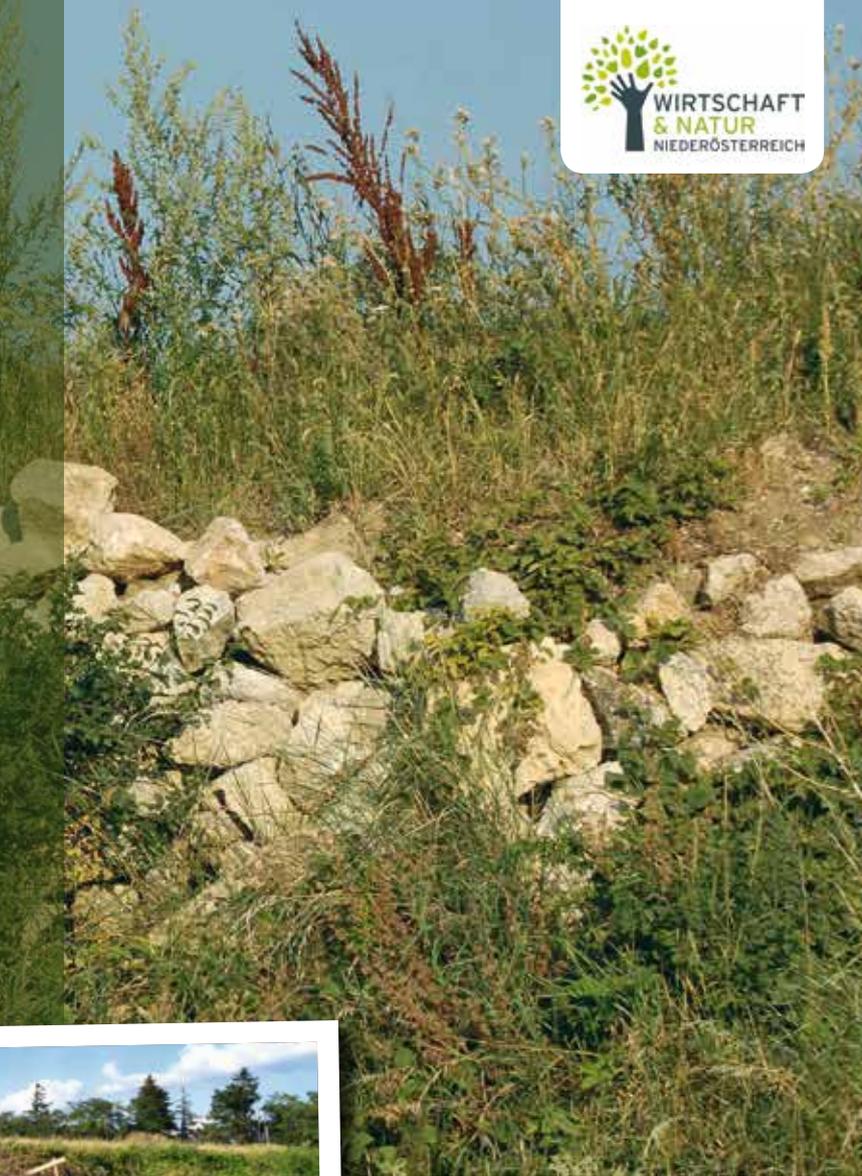
## Advantages for your company:



- Birds and bats can assume their important roles as "insect vigilantes".
- Measures such as the ones mentioned above require only little space and little planning. They are not costly at all. Nevertheless, by doing so you can contribute tremendously to species protection and you will be rewarded by surroundings which are very much alive and offer extensive adventures with nature.

# A DIVERSITY OF SLOPES

By installing dry-stone walls or slopes you do not only overcome differences in height but you also create new habitats, new hideouts and migration corridors for species like the lizards. Building dry-stone walls with your co-workers reinforces corporate identity and strengthens staff's empathy for nature.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- For most animals, dry-stone walls pose no insurmountable barriers. Endangered flora and fauna can find habitats and retreat in such walls.
- Depending on the wall's exposure, steepness, and plant life, some very rare species might settle there.
- Areas with excessive sunlight can get quite hot and can, therefore, be homes to drought-resistant plants. Many heat loving animals will also find adequate living conditions there.
- Walls in shaded areas offer wide-spread room for moss and ferns, toads and frogs, shrew mice, beetles, spiders, and snails.

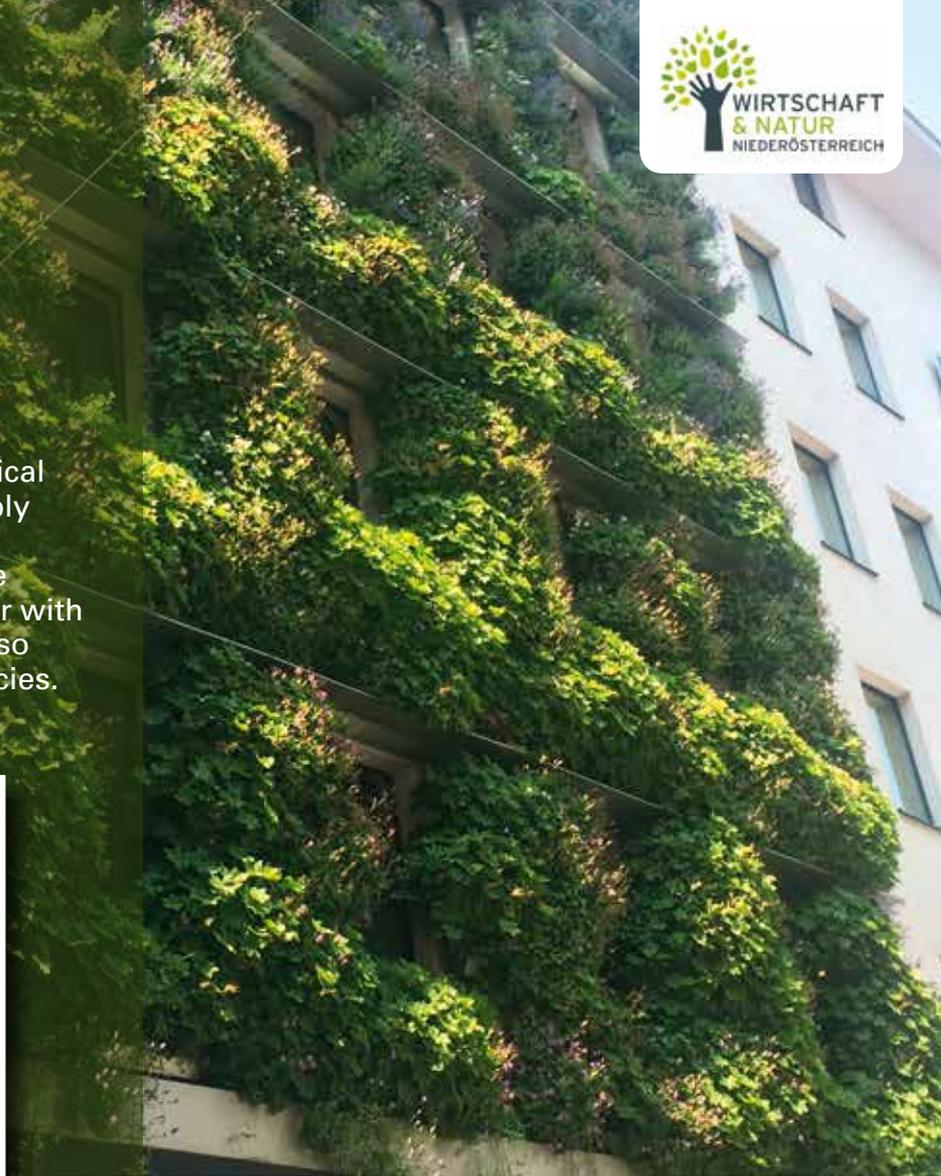
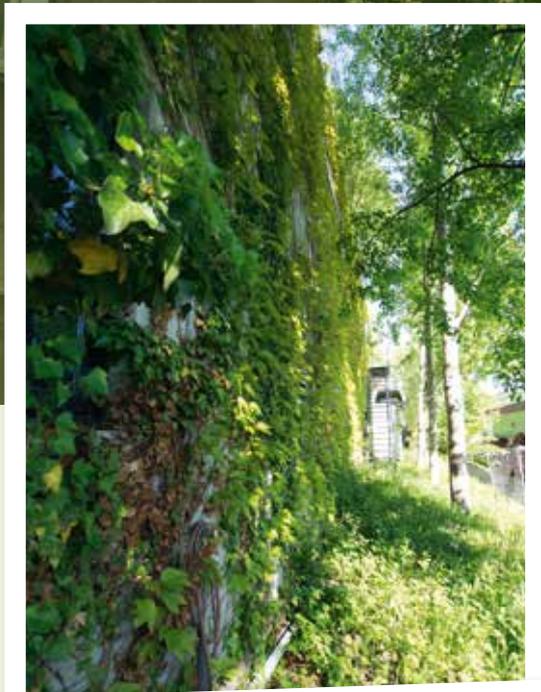
## Advantages for your company:



- Ecological solutions incorporating such slopes are, in most cases, cheaper, more flexible, more durable and optically more pleasing than walls made of concrete.
- Recreational areas are thus expanded and – with adequate information and communication – your staff will obtain better insights into nature.

# FACADE GREENING

Facade greenery is like your „ecological business card“. It demonstrates visibly your commitment to biodiversity. By letting plants grow on the façade, the building does not only blend in better with its surroundings, but the greenery also provides a habitat for numerous species.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Songbirds use green façades as habitats and breeding space.
- Local climbing plants (ivy, clematis, common hop) provide food and shelter for many species.

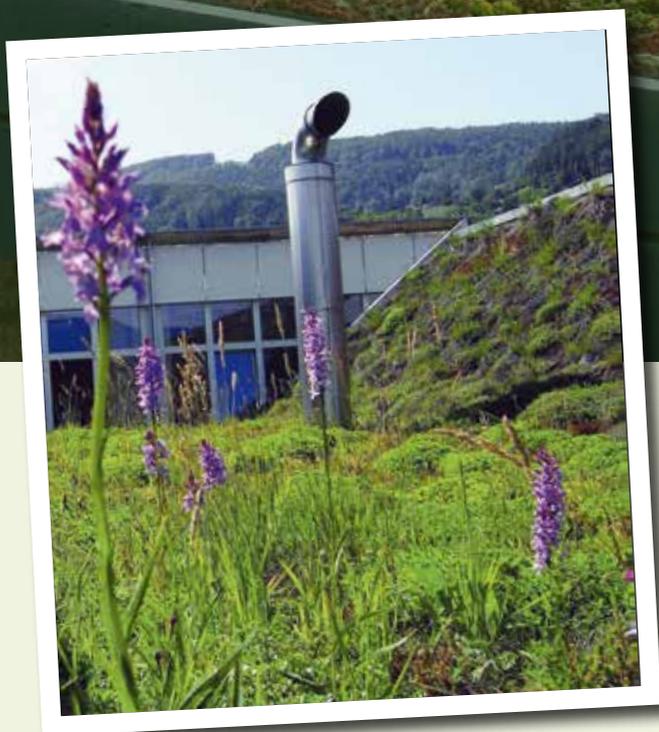
## Advantages for your company:



- Facade greenery is a visually appealing form to demonstrate your company's concern for the environment.
- It is an inexpensive source of shade and sun block in summer as well as a cooling solution due to its evaporative powers; but in winter the light shines through.
- The plants filter dust, thus improving the quality of the air on company premises.
- This “green blanket” keeps façades safe from intense downpours, overheating, frost, and air pollutants.
- Green facades require less space than trees.

# ROOFTOP GREENERY

Green roofs in gray industrial areas add colour accents. Dry grasslands in nutrient-poor soils or colourful gardens or shrubbery form substitute habitats for many species of fauna.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Rooftop greening provides habitats for many species of plants and animals.
- Green roofing improves the microclimate by filtering dust and air pollutants and counteracting the heat that emanates from densely populated areas.
- Roof greenery with a height of 10 to 15 cm can evaporate half the year's rainfall.
- This cooling effect of evaporation on green roofs can also make your photovoltaic system more efficient.

## Advantages for your company:



- More durable than common gravel roofs.
- Protection against heat, coldness, and UV radiation. Green roofs help create a pleasant microclimate.
- Maintenance work is minimal.
- Because of its high water retention capacity, negative side effects of extreme downpours are lessened and potential damage is limited.

# OPEN SPACE FOR MAN AND NATURE

With all the technical equipment found at the workplace, close-to-nature outdoors offer staff invigorating and relaxing options and a change of pace. A variety of accessible habitats on company grounds does not only delight employees; such habitats also accommodate numerous animals and plants.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Diverse, well-positioned areas can, like building blocks, provide habitats for different plant and animal species (e.g. piles of dead wood, clearance cairn).
- In industrial areas, such sites can also serve as important stepping stone biotopes.



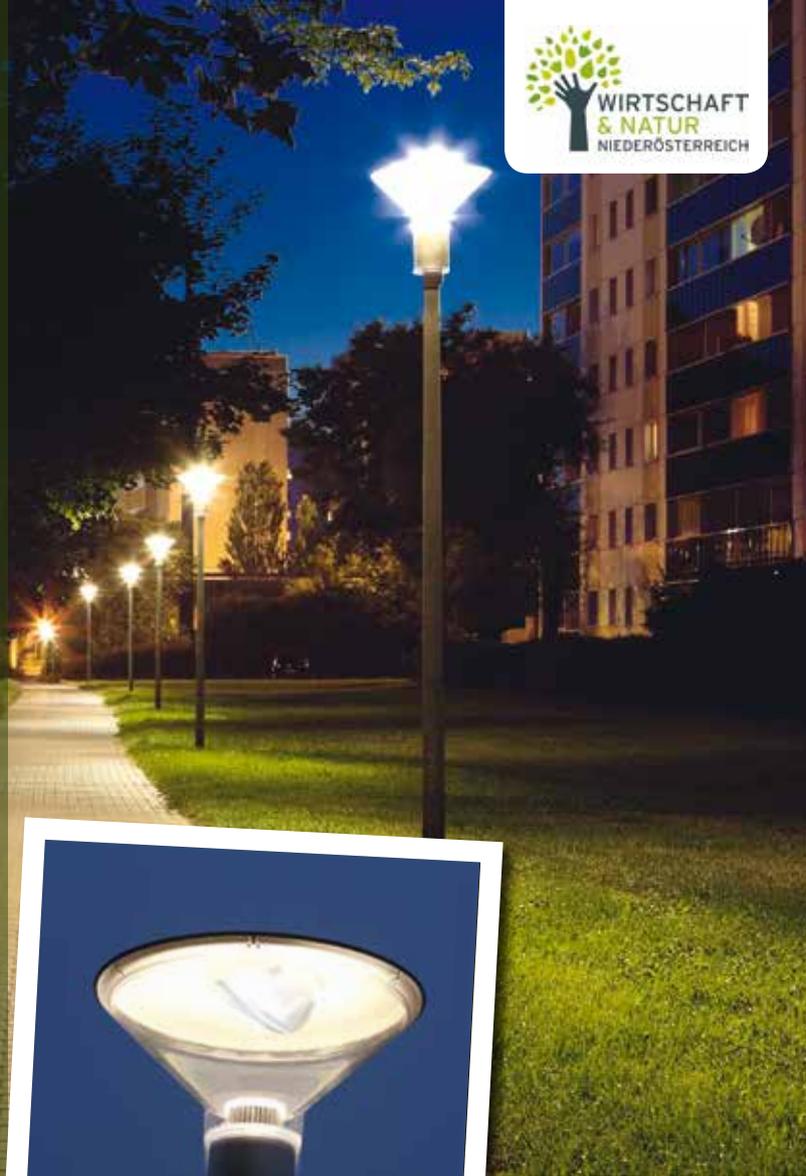
## Advantages for your company:



- The multitude of sensations which nature is able to provide (whether the song of a bird or the smell of a blossom) conveys to clients and employees alike a positive impression of your company.
- Contact with nature energizes; it increases the ability to concentrate and enjoy work. It also contributes to an appealing, relaxing environment for both work and social interactions.
- Nature-friendly play grounds for the children of employees, guests, and business partners facilitate communication.
- Close-to-nature biotopes offer insights into natural processes. These can lead employees to contribute actively to community work – volunteering to do maintenance work on dry grasslands, for example.
- Working together in caring for and maintaining parts of the company premises close to nature enhances social interaction between employees and consequently also adds to their well-being.

# INSECT-FRIENDLY LIGHTING

Excessive light emanating from street lamps and the lighting up of company buildings or billboards disrupt the natural rhythm of many insects. Migrating birds as well as nocturnal animals (i.e. hedgehogs, amphibians, and bats) suffer especially. These animals adapt their mating periods or search for food to the artificial lighting schedules. Electric light raises their energy consumption and makes them an easy prey for predators.



## Advantages for nature and the environment:



- Insects play an important role as pollinators or as sources of food for other animals (bats for example). Measures taken to help protect insects also help balance the ecological food chain.
- Insect friendly lighting is a key issue in keeping butterfly species safe. Of these, 85% are active at night and many of them are on the list of endangered species.

## Advantage for your company:



- Measures such as lighting fewer lamps or reducing the light output and installing energy saving bulbs help the company save money.



## ADDITIONAL LITERATURE & LINKS:

Are you interested? You can find further information about the project Economy & Nature Lower Austria and the close-to-nature designing of company grounds in the links below.

<http://www.naturland-noe.at/wirtschaft-natur-intro>

[www.bafu.admin.ch](http://www.bafu.admin.ch)  
[www.birdlife.at](http://www.birdlife.at)  
[www.bluehende-landschaft.de](http://www.bluehende-landschaft.de)  
[www.business-biodiversity.eu](http://www.business-biodiversity.eu)  
[www.enu.at](http://www.enu.at)  
[www.fledermausschutz.at](http://www.fledermausschutz.at)  
[www.globalnature.org](http://www.globalnature.org)  
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[www.naturnahefirmengelaende.de](http://www.naturnahefirmengelaende.de)  
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[www.wbs-krems.at](http://www.wbs-krems.at)  
[www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/raum/fassadenbegruenung.html](http://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/raum/fassadenbegruenung.html)  
[www.wildbienen.info](http://www.wildbienen.info)

Schwäbische Alb Biosphere Area (2015): **Companies Achieve Biological Diversity in the Schwäbische Alb Area**

LUBW (2013): **Modern Companies in Harmony with Nature.** Guidelines for natural premises

WWF Switzerland (2010): **Biodiversity – Campaign/Activities Manual**

Province of Upper Austria (2006): **Ways to Nature in your Company.** Information folder

### Imprint:

Editor: Philipp Friedrich (Biosphärenpark Wienerwald Management GmbH)

Author: Philipp Friedrich, Manuela Zinöcker

Graphic design: skibargrafik-design

Image sources: gugler (page: 2, 3 H, 10 m), Alb-Gold (page 7 H, 8 rm, 15 H), Bodensee Stiftung (page: 4rm, 6 H, 8 Im., 10 H + lu, 13 Im, 14 lu), GMH/Bettina Banse (page 12 ru), lakeside park/Johannes Puch: (page 4 Im, 7 Im, 9 H), lavora (page 9 Im), Ines Lemberger (page 12 H + lu), NBL/Holger Loritz (page 6 Im), Paul Westrich (page 11 Im), Philips (page 16 H & rm), Stiftung Natur und Wirtschaft (page 14 Im, 15 Im + lu), TU Wien (page 13 H & lu), werkstatt landschaft (page 7 lu)

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