

I pulled a small trowel out of my pocket, squatted down and dug into the soil to get a sense of the depth and texture. The trowel was going in easy enough, no problem with depth. I rubbed the brown, earthy soil between my fingers... I dug another spadeful, still looking. A lone worm, and some woodlice, but what had happened to the rest? Where were the springtails, the beetles, the millipedes? These were the building blocks of the food chain. I felt a jolt of anxiety in my gut. I'd not dug in soil for twenty years. Statistics were one thing, but the soil was barren... where has all the life gone?

I straightened up and peered round the garden. A few decking boards, and panels from the old shed lay among the logs and would have been chemically treated. I looked at the tree stump from the eucalyptus. There was little point treating stumps with pesticide as they won't grow once cut down to that level, but commercial gardeners often did anyway, so it could be that. I wasn't sure of the problem but I had some potential solutions I could throw at it.

'The treated wood should be removed as it will be toxic to wildlife.' I told Lori.

'So a trip to the dump after all. Anything else?'

I looked again at the bamboo and my eyes narrowed.