



Backyard Wildlife Habitats

Introduction

Backyard landscapes can be easily transformed to provide the four basic elements of habitat (food, cover, water and space). The following tips will create healthier and more balanced habitats to attract a wide variety of wildlife species. Even the smallest properties can be landscaped to be inviting to wildlife.

Plant Selection

Plants are among the most important features of wildlife habitat. Native plants should be selected and planted to mimic natural patterns to provide balanced habitat for wildlife.

Native Plants:

Wildlife have co-existed with native plants, and evolved to use native plant communities for food and cover. Native plants are also adapted to local soil and climate conditions, and once established typically require less fertilizer and pesticide treatments to maintain.



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Native black-eyed Susan plants

Some ornamental plants (i.e. English ivy, purple loosestrife) can become invasive and out-compete native plants to create monocultures unsuitable for wildlife, and should therefore be avoided.



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Monocultures of invasive purple loosestrife

Plant Cover:

Trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses should be included to provide vertical structure. A combination of evergreens and deciduous plants will ensure year-round cover.



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Vertical structure and evergreen plants

Plants as Food Sources:

Seeds, nuts, and fruits from plants are important food sources for wildlife. Plants should be selected to bloom at different periods to provide a food supply throughout the year. Certain plants can be planted to attract specific wildlife species. For instance, nectar producing plants will attract hummingbirds and butterflies.



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Grapes – a favorite food of many birds

Natural Cover

Dead vegetation, including snags, fallen trees and brush piles can also provide a great source of cover for wildlife.



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Turtle by woody cover

Water

Water is vital to attracting wildlife to any backyard habitat. Aquatic gardens can be created in depressional areas or by diverting runoff from impervious surfaces such as driveways and rooftops. Aquatic gardens should be constructed to less than 18" in depth, planted with wetland vegetation, and surrounded with cover to optimize wildlife use.

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