

INTRODUCTION TO BACKYARD MANAGEMENT



The area around your home, including the backyard, is the perfect location to enhance wildlife habitat. One reason is that you are already managing the property--growing and mowing grass, tending to trees and shrubs, and planting flower and vegetable gardens. You can use these management strategies to enhance wildlife habitat. Another reason the backyard should be managed for wildlife is that your backyard is probably an edge to another type of habitat such as a cropland, grassland, woodlot, brushland, fencerow, hedge, or other land boundary. With a little management, wildlife that inhabit these edges will most likely frequent your yard. Further, what better place to enjoy wildlife than in your own backyard? Also, developing a wildlife management plan for your backyard can enhance the natural beauty of your home and actually increase its value.

Before you can develop a management plan, you should know what wildlife need to survive, and thus what will attract them to your yard. Wildlife cannot exist without the four components that comprise habitat: food, water, cover, and space. When their habitat is fragmented or destroyed, these components become limited. Remove



or fail to provide any one of these components and wildlife will not survive. These conditions put wildlife at risk, including vulnerability to predators, accidents, and starvation. Because some types of wildlife are not very mobile, local populations may be easily lost when habitat is destroyed. Also, different kinds of wildlife need different combinations of food, water, cover, and space.

Your property may not be large enough to provide all of the habitat needs for the kinds of wildlife you wish to attract. However, you can offer one or more components of habitat and still attract a variety of wildlife to your yard. Usually, a management plan with the widest range of plantings and artificial structures and features will attract the greatest assortment and number of birds, mammals, butterflies, moths, amphibians, and reptiles. Working with neighbors on an overall management plan is a good way to increase both of your properties' appeal to wildlife. Patience is important because some wildlife species may require several years to find the habitat and use it.

Backyard Habitat Components

Food for wildlife is easy to supply. Besides planting natural foods, you can supplement with a variety of products, especially for seed-eat-



ing birds. Although wildlife can't survive in your backyard on food alone, you can attract migrant birds and nearby resident species. The ideal backyard plan supplies as much diversity in food items as possible through plantings of shrubs, trees, flowers, and grasses. Carefully choosing these plants can provide food directly in the form of fruits, berries, nuts, seeds, and nectar. Indirectly, they provide habitat for other sources of food such as insects, spiders, grubs, and worms. Features such as small ponds and piles of rocks, brush, and leaves improve both the variety and quantity of available food.



Wildlife need **water**, for both drinking and bathing. You can provide water in a birdbath, recirculating waterfall, shallow dish, or dripping hose. Most desirable is a small, shallow pond with an area large enough to support plants that grow in water and around the edge. The pond will become the center of activity for a wide range of wildlife species. Turtles and frogs will sun there and make use of the pond's cover as a nursery area for their young. Insects will use the pond for reproduction, greatly enhancing the food chain.

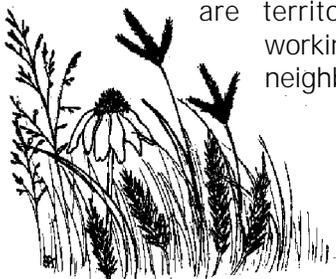
Cover helps shield wildlife from harmful weather and protects them from predators. Different kinds of cover serve the sheltering

needs of different wildlife species. Rock piles or piles of wood, for example, help keep chipmunks safe from hawks and cats.



Brush piles protect rabbits, toads, and salamanders. Dense shrubs shelter chickadees and cardinals. Painted turtles and leopard frogs hide under submerged logs when threatened. Cavities in trees offer safe places for squirrels. The farther an animal must venture from shelter, the more vulnerable it is to predation, and that is why plants that provide both food and cover are an important consideration. Placing trees, shrubs, flowers, or grasses in clumps creates a natural community and provides diversity. Also, adding specific wildlife houses to your property may attract bats, wood ducks, and a wide variety of songbirds.

All wildlife need **space** and some species--in particular most nesting birds--are highly territorial. Space and territorial needs vary with each wildlife species. By understanding how much space is necessary for each species, you can learn what wildlife is attracted to your property. Bluebirds, for instance, are territorial and need about five acres per pair. In contrast, purple martins are not territorial, and need only small areas. You can create a larger area for those species that are territorial by working with neighbors.



The greater the diversity of habitat, the greater the variety and number of wildlife species attracted to the habitat. Some of the best backyard habitats are those comprised of trees bordered by tall shrubs and low shrubs, which are next to wildflowers or native grasses bordered by a small amount of lawn. Each border provides a different kind of "edge". What follows is a summary of management ideas for your property. Each consideration is more fully explained in the chapters in this Backyard Section.

Trees and Shrubs

Trees and shrubs add color to landscapes, provide shade in summer, protection from wind in winter, and offer texture to the area around your home. Planting trees and shrubs in your yard will reduce the area of lawn, which will reduce mowing and maintenance giving you more time to enjoy your property. In the long run it will also save you money as you will no longer need fertilizers, pesticides, or irrigation. Plantings that serve a dual-purpose--providing food for wildlife and aesthetic beauty for your home, for example--increase in home value, and therefore deserve strong consideration in backyard planning.



The wildlife habitat components that trees and shrubs create include cover for nesting and rearing young, secure winter cover, and summer, fall, and winter foods. For example, dense pines and spruces provide roosting sites and escape

cover for mourning doves, chickadees, and other songbirds. Gray dogwood and American mountain-ash offer fall fruits to migrating birds. Tall oaks and hickories provide hard mast (nuts) to squirrels and blue jays in winter and cool shade on hot summer days.

When choosing trees and shrubs for your property, considering color, texture, and height will help you to provide a pleasing landscape. Early blossoming shrubs such as crabapples, lilacs, and red-bud offer spring color. Silky dogwood and red elder give summer color, and red elder, serviceberry, and red-osier dogwood provide a palette of beauty in late summer and early fall. Fall-fruiting shrubs and the leaves of maple, birch, aspen, and other deciduous trees furnish an array of color in fall. Red-osier dogwoods show a striking red, and conifers give a pleasing green to a bleak winter landscape.

Pyramidal-shaped American mountain-ash and spruces, round-shaped crabapples and dogwoods, and flat junipers all add different shapes and sizes to your property. The fine textures of hemlock, white pine, and serviceberry can be a sharp contrast to rough-textured plants such as hawthorn and jack pine. Trees and shrubs come in all heights. Choosing a variety assures nesting and feeding sites for birds with strong preferences for specific elevations, providing visual screens, and adding to landscape diversity.

Grasses and Ground Covers

Mowed lawns require time and money to maintain, and they provide little habitat for wildlife.

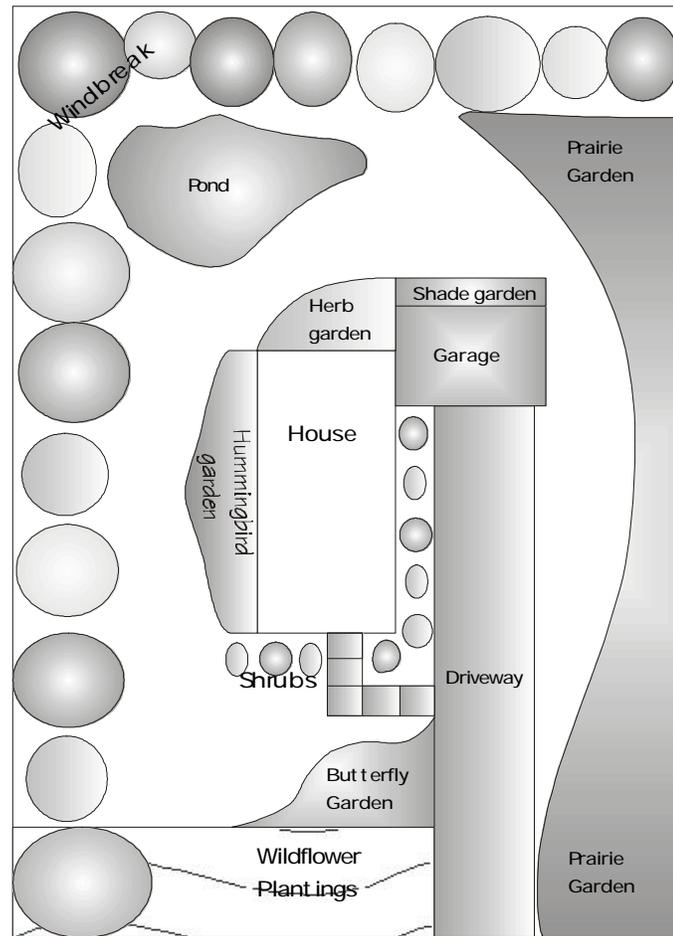
INTRODUCTION



Canada wild-rye

Monocultures of weed-free grass demand water, fertilizers, herbicides, and frequent mowing, and they are easily stressed by extreme drought or wet conditions. An estimated 70 percent of pesticide use occurs on the nation's lawns, but those with diverse wildflowers, groundcovers, and native grasses provide for a healthier, environmentally friendly lawn, which does not need chemicals. For these reasons, consider reducing the mowed areas in your yard to as little as possible.

Areas with tall, unmowed, or infrequently mowed grasses can provide outstanding wildlife habitat such as nesting and brooding areas, insect-foraging sites, and green foraging areas for deer and rabbits. Brown thrashers, bluebirds, pheasants, and wild turkeys are among several types of birds that also use such unmowed areas. These can be places where you let the grass go wild or where you plant to a specific grass type to create a meadow, prairie, or wildflower viewing spot. Mixing flowers with grasses is a good choice as they will furnish a nectar source for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.



A landscape providing the four wildlife habitat components: food, water, cover, and space.

Ground covers offer an ideal opportunity to reduce the mowed lawn surface and to develop low-maintenance wildlife habitat. Examples include wild ginger, wintergreen, and bearberry. They provide nest sites for ground-nesting songbirds, brood-rearing areas for pheasants and quail, and protective cover for rabbits and chipmunks. Such plantings can provide more formal settings for wildlife landscaping projects.

Special Feature Gardens

Everyone loves a garden. Specialty gardens serve to enhance

viewing pleasure and attract certain kinds of wildlife. Butterfly, hummingbird, and native prairie gardens are well suited to this purpose. Besides adding beauty to the landscape, gardens that are creatively designed and well-tended can increase the value of your property. On larger properties these special-feature gardens break up the monotony of your lawn and reduce mowing time. If you do not own property, you can still enjoy a small-scale garden by arranging planters and potted flowers on the balcony or deck of your apartment, townhouse, or condominium.

INTRODUCTION

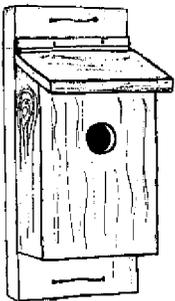
Wildflowers

Michigan has a wide variety of native wildflowers that offer spectacular color and are well-suited to a number of locations. What better way to create beauty and wildlife habitat, along with contributing to our state's natural heritage, than by planting native wildflowers on your property? Once established, wildflowers enhance the attractiveness of the landscape, help control erosion, furnish food and cover for wildlife, and provide maximum enjoyment with minimal care. An increasing number of property owners are converting portions of their large, high-maintenance lawns to plantings of wildflowers. After the initial cost to establish them, you will save money and time by not having to fertilize, mow, and rake your lawn. Wildflower stands are also showing up in increasing numbers on public property, such as highway rights-of-way, corporate industrial parks, and various recreational areas.

Homes and Feeders for Wildlife

Planting trees and shrub thickets give some birds roosting shelters, food sources, and places to

build their nests. Leaving leaf litter, rotting logs, and fallen branches in a woodland setting provides homes for salamanders and snakes. Standing dead or dying trees (snags)



attract woodpeckers, squirrels, screech owls, and other cavity nesters. Restoring or protecting wetlands helps furnish homes for waterfowl and other wetland birds, turtles, snakes, frogs, toads, and salamanders. In addition to creating natural homes for wildlife, consider building nest boxes and feeding stations and placing them in your backyard to enhance viewing pleasure.

In summary, your backyard is the ideal place to create wildlife habitat. Once established, you will reduce the amount of maintenance, saving time and money. In addition, you will have attracted many kinds of wildlife to watch and enjoy.

FOR ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS CONTACT:

Michigan United
Conservation Clubs
PO Box 30235
Lansing, MI 48909
517/371-1041



Private Land Partnerships: This partnership was formed between both private and public organizations in order to address private lands wildlife issues. Individuals share resources, information, and expertise. This landowner's guide has been a combined effort between these groups working towards one goal: Natural Resources Education. We hope this manual provides you with the knowledge and the motivation to make positive changes for our environment.

FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE: CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT