



Providing habitat for wildlife in your own backyard

Many homeowners are interested in improving their property by landscaping, cleaning up trash, and planting flower beds and vegetable gardens. Many of the same things that improve the aesthetic value of your property can also benefit wildlife. This article provides ideas for projects that will help attract wildlife to your backyard and maintain a year-round natural habitat.

A wildflower garden adds beauty to your property as well as providing wildlife habitat.



DNR photo

Add evergreen cover to your property

Evergreens are very important to wildlife not only because they provide food for some species but also because they provide important thermal cover in winter. Spring is the time to plant evergreens that will become an essential element in your backyard habitat. Evergreens with branches close to the ground give animals some refuge from the snow and provide the best thermal cover. Evergreens planted in groups or “clumps” provide the best protection from wind and blowing snow, but one single evergreen tree or shrub is certainly better than none. Sharp-shinned hawks, mourning doves, black-capped and Carolina chickadees and red squirrels are just some of the species that take cover in evergreens. Some examples of native evergreen trees with high food and cover value for wildlife are red cedar, white pine, eastern hemlock and American holly. Some native evergreen shrubs that benefit wildlife are American yew, rhododendron and mountain laurel.



Evergreen trees provide shelter from the weather and predators, and food for some wildlife.

Art Shomo

Spring backyard habitat projects

Install a nest box or shelf

Many species of birds will nest and raise their young in your backyard if the right habitat exists. Eastern bluebirds, house wrens, eastern phoebes and American robins are just a few of the species that will build their nests in nest boxes (bluebirds and wrens) or on nesting shelves (phoebes and robins). It is important that pesticides aren't used in a backyard habitat where birds are nesting because parent birds feed their young insects, which may be poisoned by the use of pesticides.



Eastern bluebird making use of a nest box.

DNR photo



Monarch sipping nectar from milkweed flowers.

Mark Stock

Plant a garden for hummingbirds and butterflies

Planting a butterfly and hummingbird garden near your home will not only benefit these attractive nectar-feeders, but the flowers will add beauty as well. A few of the native perennials that attract and feed both hummingbirds and butterflies are bee balm, cardinal flower, wild columbine, asters, ironweed, joe-pye weed, milkweed and butterfly weed. Some native plants to feed the caterpillars of butterflies, which are essential to the survival of butterfly populations, are clovers, common milkweed, unmowed grasses, spicebush, sassafras, dogwood, violets and asters.

Provide natural foods for all seasons

Fruiting plants – Songbirds, game birds and mammals rely on the fruit provided by West Virginia's diverse selection of shrubs and vines. Many of these shrubs and vines also provide nesting and escape cover for wildlife. A few examples of fruiting species [and when their fruits are available to wildlife] are blueberry

[summer and fall], serviceberry [summer], dogwood [fall], wild grape [summer and fall], sumac [winter and early spring], and highbush cranberry [fall and winter].

Nuts and acorns – Nuts, such as hickory nuts, beechnuts and acorns from oak trees are highly preferred foods for many wildlife species. Deer, squirrels, chipmunks, bears, turkeys, grouse, wood ducks and raccoons all feed heavily on nuts and acorns in the fall. Bulking up on these high-carbohydrate foods enable animals to survive through the winter. Some of the native nut- and acorn-producing trees and shrubs that have high value for wildlife are hickories (shagbark, pignut, mockernut, butternut), black walnut, butternut, American beech, witch-hazel, American hazelnut, beaked hazelnut, and oaks (white, chestnut, black, scarlet, scrub, northern red).



Acorns are a preferred food of many wildlife species.

DNR photo