

Creating a Wild Backyard - Wild-Scaping Large Areas (1 acre or more)

Gardening for wildlife has become a favorite backyard hobby for millions of people. This page is designed to give you ideas on turning your backyard into a wildlife garden, with helpful tips on how to arrange food, water, and shelter elements of habitat for wildlife. The Wild Acres site can also help you as you plan your garden with more in-depth information on specific topics such as [wildflower meadows](#). Always be sure your wildscape plans comply with local ordinances.

Once your wildscape is planted, the fun really begins as you observe and discover wildlife as they discover your wildscape. The wildlife species that will visit your backyard is largely determined by the location of your backyard in proximity to other backyards or undisturbed open space. Wildlife visiting backyards in Western Maryland will differ from backyards on the Eastern Shore, but songbirds, hummingbirds, deer, frogs, turtles, butterflies, squirrels, rabbits, and chipmunks are just a few of the species you may observe enjoying your wildscape. The age of your neighborhood also plays a part in what species will be attracted to your wildscape. Wildlife that need old trees as residences will begin to frequent neighborhoods with large trees but new neighborhoods with young trees tend to lack such wildlife.

Always be sure to consider space, light, soil and watering requirements of each plant before planting them in your wildscape. Plant nurseries and garden centers are good sources for plant care information. Use organic solutions to insect and disease problems instead of pesticides whenever possible. Check out the page on [Beneficial Insects](#) to learn more about insects that can work for you as well as alternatives to pest control.



Black-capped chickadees are easy to attract with the right element. Photo by: USFWS

Diversity is the Key

Some large lots are comprised of grass with very little landscaping. The key to creating excellent wildlife habitat, regardless of the total size of the yard, is to offer a diverse habitat. Small trees and shrubs should form the "backbone" of the garden with lower growing annuals and perennials planted in front. Create a diversity of vertical habitat by planting groundcovers and arbors in addition to trees, shrubs and flowers. These plants form layers of habitat that are attractive to a greater number of wildlife species than if you just planted grass and trees. Also, select plants that do "double duty" in the wildlife garden by serving as food and shelter, which is especially important where space is limited. How much grass should you keep? If you have children or pets, then some grass is necessary. A general rule of thumb is to have 60% or more of your yard area (excluding the house) planted in something other than grass. This rule is for the person who wants to retire their mower completely and incorporates a diverse blending of shrubs, annuals, perennials and vines in an arrangement that makes good use of available vertical space. Other vertical components adding dimension to the design include window boxes and a grape vine.

Habitat Elements

Food

Trees, shrubs and flowers represent important food components in the wildlife garden. Plants provide food in the fruit they produce, including seeds, berries, or nuts, or serve as food themselves. Plants should be chosen so that a variety of plants flower and fruit all season, which ensures a natural food supply will always be available to wildlife. Also, keep in mind the fruiting characteristics of plants. Inkberries and yews are dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers are on separate plants. If berries are desired as a food component than a male and female must be planted near each other. It's also imperative to prune these shrubs carefully and at the proper time of year to make sure you don't severely prune off your future food supply.

Annuals and perennials are excellent sources of nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies, bees and moths. After flowering, some annuals and perennials produce seeds that are enjoyed by songbirds. Be sure to select flower varieties that produce single rather than double flowers because singles are richer sources of nectar. Annuals, as a general rule, flower for a longer period than perennials and can provide vivid colors. Perennials should be chosen so that something is flowering throughout the season. Some of the best bee and butterfly plants are herbs, which when planted, can also add to your kitchen creations.

Water

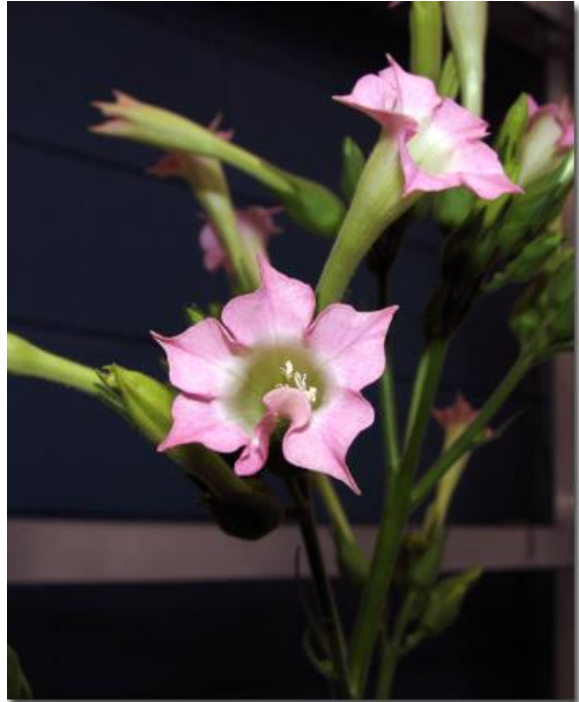
Fresh water is probably the most important habitat element that you can add to your wildlife garden. There are many kinds of pedestal birdbaths commercially available. A ground birdbath placed in the garden with a circulating pump and mister may attract shy warblers and is a good choice for yards that aren't accessible to free-roaming predators (like cats). A shallow saucer or dish filled with fresh water does just as well. There are also birdbaths commercially available that can attach directly to porch and deck railings that are just as useful for birds to drink and bathe. A saucer filled with sand and kept wet provides water and nutrients for butterflies and toads too! Larger properties may also have streams and backyard ponds which can provide a sufficient water source for wildlife.

Shelter

Evergreen trees and shrubs and bushy or thorny deciduous shrubs can provide shelter for wildlife, even when planted near to the house in a foundation bed. Depending on the shrub, birds may even nest in it. Wildlife need shelter from the weather and safe places to rest and nest away from predators.

Planting evergreens near feeders can provide year-round shelter for birds.

A grape arbor provides a nice shady retreat for both you and wildlife. In addition to these plant components, bird nesting boxes also provide important shelter for many wildlife species to raise their young. Roosting boxes provide safe places for resting and protection from the elements. If you have a shady spot with some space, then consider adding a [toad abode](#) to the landscape. If you have the space, then consider leaving [Snags and Logs](#) or creating [Brush Piles](#) for cover.



Flowering Tobacco can attract pollinators and birds.
Photo by: Kerry Wixted

Recommended Plant List

The following list provides some recommendations for wildlife friendly plants. When selecting plants, keep in mind the size of your space as well as soil and light requirements for the plants you install. Also, be an informed consumer and stay away from plants that are known to be invasive. For a list of commonly planted invasive species, check out the [“Bad Plants Planted by Good People”](#) page.

Annuals

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Cosmos	N	Jun-Aug	Attractive to bees and butterflies
Flowering Tobacco (<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>)	N	May-Jul	Attractive to bees, butterflies and birds.
Hollyhocks (<i>Alcea spp.</i>)	N		Attractive to bees and butterflies; biennial
Pentas (<i>Pentas spp.</i>)	N	Jun-Sept	Nectar attracts bees, butterflies, birds
Petunia (<i>Petunia spp.</i>)	N	Apr-Jul	Can attract butterflies like Painted ladies
Salvia (<i>Salvia spp.</i>)	N	May-Sep	Great for beneficial insect pollinators
Sunflowers (<i>Helianthus annuus</i>)	N	Jun-Aug	Attracts butterflies, bees, beneficial insects, birds and small mammals
Sweet William/Phlox (<i>Phlox divaricata</i>)	Y	Apr-Jun	Showy spring flower that attracts butterflies
Sweet William (<i>Dianthus barbatus</i>)	N	Jun-Jul	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds
Zinnia	N		Great for butterflies and other pollinators

Grasses

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Big Bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>)	Y	Jun-Sep	Clump forming plant which provides cover
Eastern Gamagrass (<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>)	Y	Jun-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides cover and seeds for wildlife
Indiangrass (<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides cover
Little bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides cover and seeds for wildlife
Purpletop (<i>Tridens flavus</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Best in dry fields; provides cover
Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)	Y	Jul-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides food for sparrows and other songbirds
Virginia wild rye (<i>Elymus virginicus</i>)	Y	Jun-Oct	Clump forming plant which tolerates a wide range of conditions
Wild Oats (<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>)	Y	Jul-Sep	Provides cover



- Gene Cooley

Wild Oats produce attractive fruits while also providing cover for wildlife.

Herbs*

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Dill (<i>Anethum graveolens</i>)	N		Host for Black swallowtail larvae
Fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>)	N		Host for Black swallowtail larvae
Rosemary (<i>Rosemaryinus officinalis</i>)	N		Good for bees
Sweet Marjoram (<i>Origanum vulgare</i>)	N		Good for bees
Thyme (<i>Thymus</i>)	N		Excellent for bees
* Note: many herbs can be aggressive in the garden, so it is best to plant them in containers			

Perennials

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Beebalm (<i>Monarda didyma</i>)	Y	Jul-Sep	Showy, aromatic flowers which attract hummingbirds and butterflies
Beardtongue (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>)	Y	Jun-Aug	Great for hummingbirds
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)	Y	Jun-Oct	Provides both a pollen and nectar source for wildlife
Blazingstar (<i>Liatris spicata</i>)	Y	Jul-Aug	Nectar source for butterflies and beneficial insect; grows in dry soil
Butterflyweed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	Y	May-Jul Aug-Nov	Host plant for monarch butterflies. Also attracts adult butterflies
Common Milkweed (<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>)	Y	May-Jun Aug-Nov	Host plant for butterflies; fragrant and attracts beneficial insects
Goldenrods (<i>Solidago spp.</i>)	Y/N		Attracts butterflies and beneficial insects
Ironweed (<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Host plant for butterflies
Joe Pyeweed (<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>)	Y	Jul-Oct	Attracts songbirds, butterflies and beneficial insects; great for rain gardens

Larkspurs (<i>Delphinium spp.</i>)	Y/N	Apr-Jun	Provides nectar for butterflies and beneficial insects
Lupine (<i>Lupinus perennis</i>)	Y	Apr-Jun	Prefers sunny areas and acidic soil; host plant for butterflies
Partridgeberry (<i>Mitchella repens</i>)	Y	May-Jul Jul-Dec	Groundcover that provides berries for birds and small mammals
Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpureum</i>)	Y	Jul-Aug	Provides nectar for pollinators as well as seeds for birds
Stonecrops (<i>Sedum spp.</i>)	Y/N		Provides good groundcover and some varieties are used by butterflies
Turk's Cap Lily (<i>Lilium superbum</i>)			
Wild Bleeding Heart (<i>Dicentra eximia</i>)	Y	Apr-Sep	Good for songbirds and beneficial insects
Wild Columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)	Y	Apr-Jul	Great for butterflies, hummingbirds and beneficial insects



Black swallowtail larvae use plants from the Carrot family as larval hosts.
Photo by: Lynn Davidson

Shrubs

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Blueberries (<i>Vaccinium spp.</i>)	Y/N		Provide berry source for birds as well as nectar source for butterflies and bees
Coralberry (<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i>)	Y	Apr-Jun	Provides cover, nectar for insects, berries for songbirds and leaves for moths
Dogwoods (<i>Cornus spp.</i>)	Y/N		Provides cover and berries for birds and small mammals
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)	Y	May Jun-Jul	Fragrant flowers and berries important for songbirds and small mammals
Hydrangea (<i>Hydrangea spp.</i>)	Y/N	Jun-Aug	Provides cover and food for pollinators
Inkberry (<i>Ilex glabra</i>)	Y	May-Jun Sep-Mar	Provides cover and berries for songbirds and small mammals; need a male and female for berries
Juniper (<i>Juniperus spp.</i>)	Y/N		Provides year-round shelter
Rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron maximum</i>)	Y	May-Aug Sep-Nov	Provides year-round shelter for wildlife
Sweet Pepperbush (<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>)	Y	Jul-Aug Sep-Feb	Fragrant and attracts butterflies, beneficial bugs, songbirds and waterfowl; provides

Viburnums (<i>Viburnum spp.</i>)			Produce fruits enjoyed by songbirds and small mammals
Virginia Sweetspire (<i>Itea virginica</i>)	Y	Jun-Jul Aug-Mar	Provides nectar for beneficial insects and fruit for songbirds and small mammals
Winterberry (<i>Ilex verticillata</i>)	Y	Jun-Jul Aug-Feb	Provides cover and berries for songbirds and small mammals; need a male and female for berries
Yew (<i>Taxus canadensis</i>)	Y	Mar-May Jul-Sep	Provides cover and berries for songbirds



Goldenrods are great for attracting butterflies like this fritillary.
Photo by: Kerry Wixted

Small Trees

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
American holly (<i>Ilex opaca</i>)	Y	May-Jun	Provides year-round cover and berries for songbirds
Fire Cherry (<i>Prunus pensylvanica</i>)	Y	May Jul-Sep	High wildlife value for birds and mammals
Fringetree (<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>)	Y	May-Jun Sep-Oct	Fragrant flowers and attractive to songbirds
Flowering Dogwood (<i>Cornus florida</i>)	Y	Apr-May Sep-Dec	High wildlife value and showy flowers in spring
Mountain Ash (<i>Sorbus americana</i>)	Y	May-Jul Aug-Dec	High wildlife value for songbirds and small mammals
Paw-paw (<i>Asimina triloba</i>)	Y	Apr-Jun Aug-Sep	Produces edible fruits favored by birds, mammals and people
Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	Y	Mar-May May-Jun	Used by 58 species of wildlife in MD; berries are edible to songbirds, mammals and people
Sweetbay Magnolia (<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>)	Y	May-Jul Sep-Oct	Semi-evergreen and attractive to songbirds, mammals and beneficial insects
Sumac (<i>Rhus spp.</i>)	Y/N		Berries attractive to songbirds and small mammals



A Duskywing skipper feeds on blueberry nectar by: Kerry Wixted

Large Trees

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
American Beech (<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>)	Y	Apr-May Sep-Nov	Nuts edible to small mammals; also attracts songbirds
American Elm (<i>Ulmus americana</i>)	Y	Mar-Apr May	High wildlife value and attractive to nesting Baltimore Orioles
Bitternut (<i>Carya cordiformis</i>)	Y	Apr-May Aug-Oct	Fruits edible to mammals; attractive to songbirds
Eastern White Pine (<i>Pinus strobus</i>)	Y	May-Jul Aug-Oct	Birds and small mammals feed on seeds; provides cover
Northern Red Oak (<i>Quercus rubra</i>)	Y	Apr-May	Acorns important for many species of wildlife
Persimmon (<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>)	Y	Apr-May Sep-Nov	High wildlife value; fruits are edible for mammals, birds and people

Slippery Elm (<i>Ulmus rubra</i>)	Y	Mar-May	High wildlife value
Sugar Maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>)	Y	Apr-May Sep-Oct	High wildlife value for songbirds and small mammals
Tulip Poplar (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>)	Y	June Aug-Nov	Attracts hummingbirds, songbirds and small mammals
White Ash (<i>Fraxinus americana</i>)	Y	Apr-May Aug-Feb	Attracts birds, butterflies, beneficial bugs and small mammals
White Oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	Y	Mar-May Sep-Oct	Acorns valuable for wildlife; MD state tree; high wildlife value



American Holly provides berries and year-round cover for a variety of wildlife. Photo by: Kerry Wixted



Many wildlife species enjoy White Oak acorns. Photo by: Steve J. Baskauf
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Vines

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Bittersweet (<i>Celastrus scandens</i>)	Y	May-Jun Sept-Dec	Provides fruits, buds and leaves. Excellent winter food for birds.
Oriental bittersweet (<i>C. orbiculatus</i>) is invasive.			
Passionflower (<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>)	Y	Jun-Sep Sep-Oct	Great for butterflies and provides edible fruits
Trumpet Creeper (<i>Campsis radicans</i>)	Y	Jul-Sep Aug-Mar	Great for butterflies and hummingbirds
Trumpet Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>)	Y	Apr-Oct Aug-Mar	Excellent plant for hummingbirds and provides berries for songbirds
Virgin's Bower (<i>Clematis virginiana</i>)	Y	Jul-Sept Aug-Nov	Fragrant flowers; Note: avoid invasive Japanese clematis
Wild Grape (<i>Vitis spp.</i>)	Y/N		Provides berries for wildlife



Passionflower is attractive to many species of butterflies.
Photo by: Kerry Wixted

For Additional Information, Contact:

Sarah Witcher

Wildlife and Heritage Service

580 Taylor Ave, E-1

Annapolis, MD 21401

sarah.witcher1@maryland.gov

Phone: 410-260-8566



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