

Landscaping Principles for Creating Wildlife Habitat



Urban yards can play host to a wide range of birds, butterflies, bees, amphibians, insects, spiders and other wildlife. While each species will have its own particular habitat needs, there are many common landscaping principles that will support a wide range of creatures. By taking some of the following steps, you will be inviting many delightful guests into your yard!

- 1. Think "Food, Water and Shelter."** These are the critical habitat elements to put into place to make your yard an inviting space for wildlife. Food and shelter needs can be met by plantings in the landscape, built features, or a combination of both. Water sources will ideally be year round but can also be seasonal.



- 2. Include a Diversity of Plant Species.** Monocultures such as lawns or vast plantings of one perennial species do little to appeal to the needs of most species. Include flowers that bloom over different times of the year, deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs, and plants that provide a food source over the winter (i.e. seed bearing grasses and berry producing shrubs).
- 3. Go Native.** Native species have a distinct advantage over non-native species in that they have coevolved with the wildlife that is present in our region. Some insects, bees, and butterflies have a very narrow range of local plant species on which they depend. By growing native plant species, we are also contributing to the genetic diversity and viability of these species themselves.



- 4. Plant in Layers.** From low hugging ground covers, to herbaceous perennials to small shrubs and trees, to high canopied trees, to vines - multi-layered plantings create an excellent diversity of food and shelter options for a wide range of species.

- 5. Maximize Edges.** Wildlife densities are highest in the transitions zones or "edges" between two different types of habitat. You can create more "edges" in your landscape by having curved, rather than straight planting schemes.

6. Cluster Plantings. Most species will be more strongly attracted to a cluster of attractive food providing plants (i.e. nectar sources) than to individual plants scattered throughout the landscape. Similarly, a thick hedge of rose bushes, saskatoons or buffalo berry will provide a much better shelter for song birds than individual shrubs dispersed throughout the landscape.

7. Mulch, Mulch, Mulch. Organic mulches mimic nature in creating excellent hiding spots for a whole host of insects, spiders, beetles, worms and other organisms that in turn become a food source for birds and small mammals. Leave leaf litter on the ground whenever possible to form a natural mulch. Small brush piles, dead logs, stones or boards left on the ground also create excellent habitat.



8. Keep Your Yard Off Drugs. Using pesticides and herbicides can have a very negative impact on wildlife in your yard and in the wider eco-system. There are many non-chemical alternatives for dealing with weeds or

so-called "pests" that are very effective. The best prevention is to create a diverse and well-balanced back-yard ecology that will attract a wide range of predators and prey, ensuring that no single species becomes pervasive.

9. Minimize Disturbance in Some Areas. While you will want to make full use of your yard, try to create a small area where disturbance and intervention are minimized – you never know who might turn up!

10. Sit Back and Enjoy the Scenery! Attracting wildlife to your yard is a great way to become more in touch with our local eco-system. Exposing children to nature at a young age results in a higher degree of "eco-literacy" and a desire to enjoy and protect nature in later life. Many studies verify the healing and life enhancing effect that living in proximity to nature can have on us.

