

Creating a Wildlife Garden

If you enjoy flower gardening, add a new dimension to your planting by choosing flowers that are not only attractive, but attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and songbirds. This is an excellent way to provide food and cover for these species and enjoy their beauty and uniqueness.

Starting a Wildlife Garden

Even if your property is small, you can usually find an area to plant your wildlife garden. For best results, your garden needs to get at least a half-day of sunshine. A southern exposure is best, but gardens that face east or west will also work. Growing a successful garden also involves careful planning. Allow enough lead-time to plan your garden space, gather equipment, and purchase seeds or plants so that you're ready to plant in the spring.



By choosing the right plants in your gardens, you can greatly increase the number of butterflies, hummingbirds, and songbirds that will visit your property.

Attracting Butterflies, Hummingbirds, and Songbirds

Birds and butterflies will seek out your property if you provide food for them to eat. Hummingbirds and butterflies feed on the nectar of a variety of flowers, and songbirds eat the seeds and berries of the shrubs and flowers that you can grow in a garden.

Insects and spiders also provide an excellent source of protein for growing birds. During the spring especially, aphids, flies, mosquitoes, and beetles are just a few of the insects the birds need to feed both themselves and their young. Luckily, these insects will be attracted to the plants that you grow in your wildlife garden.

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are the smallest birds on earth. Almost everything about the hummingbird is unique – their dazzling iridescent colors; the sound of their buzzing wings in flight; their darting, hurried movements. Hummingbirds can fly backwards, forward, sideways, and straight up and down. Because they move so quickly, you may only glimpse a hummingbird briefly when it stops to hover and feed.

Hummingbirds have slender, pointed bills, straight or curved, which are adapted especially for probing flowers for nectar. Because hummingbirds move quickly and have a high metabolism (the rate of burning up their food or “fuel”), they need to consume huge quantities of nectar each day. They feed 14 to 18 times per hour for less than one minute and rest in between meals.

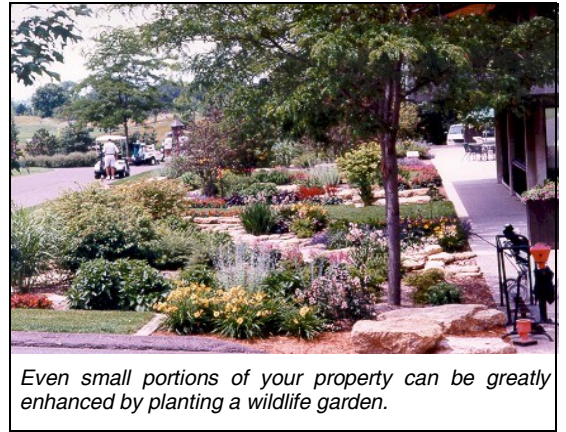


While hummingbirds rely on flowers for nectar, many flowers depend on hummingbirds for pollination. You can easily attract hummingbirds to your garden by planting some of their favorite blooms.

Butterflies

Butterflies are insects known for their large, usually bright-colored wings. In summer, you may see them flit about in gardens and along roadsides while they feed on the nectar of a variety of flowers.

All butterflies go through dramatic changes before becoming the beautiful winged creatures you recognize. Their metamorphosis proceeds through four stages: (1) egg, (2) larva (caterpillar), (3) pupa (chrysalis), and (4) adult butterfly. To entice butterflies to your garden, grow plants for both adult butterflies and caterpillars to eat. You can also provide stones for sunning and a shallow source of water.



Even small portions of your property can be greatly enhanced by planting a wildlife garden.

Songbirds

Songbirds are perching birds known for their varied and exceptional songs. There are hundreds of different songbirds in North America.

You will hear the greatest number and variety of bird songs in spring and summer when birds are courting and setting up nesting territories. The male sings to attract a mate and tell other birds to stay away from his territory – the place where breeding and raising young will occur. These songs are often complex and contain patterns of notes grouped into phrases.

Both male and females also have short, distinctive calls. They use these shorter notes to communicate with each other. Aside from the practical functions of songs and calls, birds may also sing just for pleasure. Each species of bird has its own unique song and call. Once you learn to recognize them, you can identify a bird without even seeing it.



Photo courtesy of David Leatherman

Songbirds eat a variety of foods, including insects, fruit, nuts, and seeds. They will come to your wildlife garden in spring to search for insects and in summer and fall to eat ripe berries and seeds.

Getting Started

Designing a garden to attract wildlife is similar to other kinds of gardening, except that the plants are selected as much for their food and cover value as for their beauty. The key to success is growing a diversity of plants that bloom throughout the growing season.

In addition to the following step-by-step guidelines, refer to a gardening reference book to give you more detailed information about soils, plant growth characteristics, and garden establishment.

1. Choose a location.

Consider the following factors when choosing a site for your garden. You can generally balance these factors to choose the best all-around garden site.

- Sunlight** - Select a spot with 6 to 8 hours of sun per day; south-facing sites are ideal.
- Soil** - Well drained and loamy is best
- Traffic** - Avoid heavy traffic, cut-troughs, and play areas

GETTING STARTED

1. Choose the location
2. Gather seeds & materials
3. Prepare soil
4. Plant your garden
5. Thin, weed, water, and watch!

2. Gather seeds and materials.

Refer to the attached list for plants you can grow to attract butterflies and birds. Seeds can be ordered from any number of garden catalogs or bought at garden stores. Perennial plants cost more, depending on their size and species. If planted properly, perennials are a worthwhile investment since they bloom year after year. However, it's very difficult to grow perennial flowers from seed. Unless you are an experienced gardener and have indoor growing equipment, buy perennial plants or stick with annual flowers. Start seeds indoors and transplant, or seed directly into the ground after the last expected frost.

3. Prepare the soil.

Stake off the area for your garden using a rope and wooden markers. Turn over every square foot of the garden with a spade, pitchfork, or rototiller. Remove clumps of grass sod and any large rocks. You will likely have to improve the soil by adding compost. Compost is a rich soil material comprised of decomposed plants. It adds nutrients to the soil and helps improve drainage. (Tip: Call your local municipality to obtain compost. If they collect and compost leaves, it is likely that they will be willing to give you compost for free). Dig the compost into the soil and then rake the entire area smooth.

4. Plant your garden.

Using a hoe, dig several shallow rows or trenches about one foot apart. Or divide your garden plot into two foot planting squares. Plant the seeds or plants into rows or squares so you know what has been planted in each row. If possible, plant on an overcast day when rain is expected. Then you won't have to water the site. Otherwise, wait until you complete your planting and then water the plants using a hose or watering can.

5. Thin, weed, water, and watch!

After the seedlings have emerged, thin them to the required spacing. Keep the garden watered daily (if there is no rain) for two weeks after planting. After all seedlings have emerged and are thinned, pull any weeds. Next, place a thick layer of grass clippings, straw, hay, or newspaper around the flowers and along pathways. This mulch will help the plants retain moisture and greatly reduce weed growth.

BENEFICIAL ADDITIONS

- Sunning stones for butterflies
- Water source such as a bird-bath or shallow pool
- Perching branches
- Logs
- Nest boxes



By naturalizing unused portions of your property with the appropriate plants and flowers, you can greatly enhance the habitat value.

WILDLIFE GARDEN PLANT LIST

HB= Hummingbird BF= Butterfly SB= Songbird

PERENNIALS

Asters	<i>Aster</i> spp.	BF
Beebalm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	HB, BF
Blazing star	<i>Liatris</i> spp.	HB, BF
Bleeding heart	<i>Dicentra</i> spp.	HB
Butterfly weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	BF
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia</i> spp.	BF, SB
Cardinal flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	HB, BF
Catnip	<i>Nepeta cataria</i>	HB
Coneflower	<i>Echinacea</i> spp.	BF, SB
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	HB, BF
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis</i> spp.	BF
Coral bells	<i>Heuchera sanguinea</i>	HB
Delphinium	<i>Delphinium</i> spp.	HB
Hosta	<i>Hosta</i> spp.	HB
Milkweed	<i>Asclepias</i> spp.	BF, SB
Paintbrush	<i>Castilleja</i> spp.	HB
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon</i> spp.	HB, BF
Sage	<i>Salvia</i> spp.	HB
Yucca	<i>Yucca</i> spp.	HB

ANNUAL FLOWERS

Cosmos	<i>Cosmos</i> spp.	BF, SB
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	BF, SB
Flowering tobacco	<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	HB
Fuchsia	<i>Fuchsia</i> spp.	HB
Impatiens	<i>Impatiens</i> spp.	HB, BF
Nasturtium	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	HB
Scarlet runner bean	<i>Phaseolus coccineus</i>	HB
Snapdragon	<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	HB, BF
Spider flower	<i>Cleome spinosa</i>	HB
Sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	SB, BF
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>	HB, BF, SB

VINES

Trumpet creeper	<i>Campsis radicans</i>	HB
Trumpet honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>	HB
Grape	<i>Vitis</i> spp.	SB

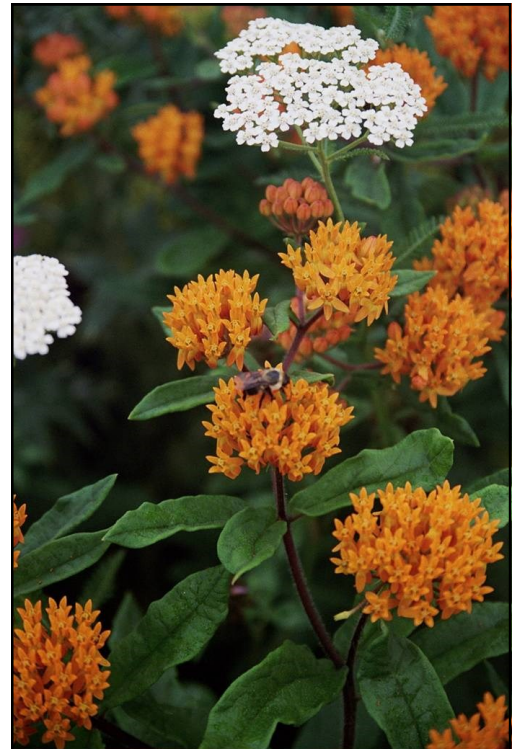
SHRUBS

Bayberry	<i>Myrica</i> spp.	SB
Blueberry	<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.	SB, BF
Current	<i>Ribes</i> spp.	SB
Dogwood	<i>Cornus</i> spp.	SB
Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus</i> spp.	HB, SB
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.	HB, BF
Scarlet bush	<i>Hamelia erecta</i>	HB
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier</i> spp.	SB
Viburnum	<i>Viburnum</i> spp.	SB

AVOID THESE INVASIVE PLANTS:

Asiatic bittersweet	<i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>
Bush honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera</i> spp.
Japanese barberry	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>
Butterfly bush	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Cotoneaster	<i>Cotoneaster</i> spp.
English holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Japanese barberry	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>
Multi-flora rose	<i>Rosa multiflora</i>
Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Russian olive	<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>
Winged euonymus	<i>Euonymus alatus</i>

Ask for trumpet vines by the Latin name to be sure you get the right vine! Other varieties can be invasive.



Butterfly weed and yarrow