

BEST PRACTICES



Create a Backyard Habitat: Fall and Winter is the Time to Plan!

What is a backyard habitat? A backyard habitat is created by converting urban landscapes into mini ecosystems that support birds, butterflies and a variety of other species. By planting native plants or incorporating simple structures, you can restore habitat components and make your yard more inviting to wildlife.

How to develop your wildlife habitat

There are four basic features that you need to provide to create sustainable wildlife habitat: food, water, shelter and nesting. If you wish to attract different types of wildlife species, you will need several types of native plants, as each species has unique habitat needs. The more diverse your plant selections, the more diverse the wildlife species you can attract.

- **Food:** Provide at least three types of food: seeds, berries, leaves, nectar or nuts. Choose plants suitable for our climate that do not demand many resources, such as water.
- **Water:** Provide at least one source for drinking and bathing. Water sources will attract more species to your backyard. Plant around streams, ponds and bird baths to provide cover and to keep your water source cool.
- **Cover:** Every species requires shelter from weather and hiding places from predators. Provide multiple cover choices such as wooded areas with shrubs, brambles, evergreens, brush and rock piles, meadow and pond like areas. You do not need a large space to provide cover, even potted plants provide cover.
- **Nesting:** Leave dead and dying trees, when possible, as they provide essential cavity habitat and food for many wildlife species, including birds and bats. Few urban sites are fortunate enough to have dead trees, so habitat may need to be supplemented by providing houses for birds, bats and other species. Build bird houses of different sizes to accommodate specific species.



Make a Plan!

Planting both trees and shrubs together creates a multi-level habitat structure that provides food and shelter for wildlife. A mix of conifer and deciduous trees can provide multiple species with different habitat types.

Native herbaceous plants also provide food and cover, and they adapted to local growing conditions. Select plants that flower and bear fruit at different times of the year. Planting flowering plants provides nectar for

hummingbirds, bees and butterflies. Take care not to plant ornamental species that are invasive, such as butterfly bush, English ivy and holly, as these species can take over native habitats and cause habitat loss. Happy planning!

For more ideas & information

- *Thurston County Guide to Noxious Weeds:* www.co.thurston.wa.us/tcweeds
- WA Department of Fish & Wildlife: www.wdfw.gov/species-habitats/living
- Thurston County-WSU Extension Native Plant Salvage: www.nativeplantsalvage.org
- National Wildlife Federation: <http://www.nwf.org>

Source: Stream Team News, Fall 2012