

CLEAN WATER IS UP TO YOU
Gardening for Wildlife and Water
Brodhead Watershed Association

Do you have a bird bath in your yard? A few shrubs? A brush pile by the back fence?

If the answer is yes, you're well on your way to a backyard habitat that's good for native wildlife — and for protecting drinking water.

A welcoming environment for you and wildlife

The Audubon Society, National Fish and Wildlife and many other outfits will guide you in creating and certifying an official “backyard habitat.” Having a goal like that can be fun. But you can start providing for wildlife with baby steps.



Ideas for homemade, repurposed bird baths are everywhere!

A bird bath, for instance. You don't need anything fancy or expensive, just be sure whatever you use is no more than 2.5 inches deep. An orphaned garbage can lid, old deep-sided sheet pan or jumbo pot saucer all work. Find a stump, or stack some bricks, concrete blocks, or stones to elevate the bath at least two feet off the ground, preferably three. Put a flat rock in the middle to hold it down and provide a landing place, add water, and you're in business.

Birds are attracted to the sound of water, and a fun project for the kids is to add a drip to the bird bath. Repurpose a gallon jug by using a hot needle to pierce a hole at one of the bottom corners. Thread a rope loop through the jug handle and hang it on a garden hook or tree branch a foot or two above your bird bath. Make sure it drips at least 10 drops a minute (if not, widen the hole slightly), and you're likely to see birds taking a shower within a day.

If a bird bath isn't your thing, consider that brush pile. Just letting it be provides shelter and cover for all kinds of critters. A few evergreens also provide shelter and cover, year-round. A fruit tree or white oak tree are great food sources. Shrubs serve up berries and nesting sites, and native flowering plants like golden rod, black-eyed Susan and Joe Pye weed produce seeds for an all-winter bird buffet.

What NOT to do

As part of your growing backyard wildlife habitat, you'll want to cut back on some common practices that harm the critters you are attracting.

That means reducing the amount of lawn you have to maintain and reducing or eliminating chemicals. Lawn is basically a wasteland when it comes to food, cover, and

nesting sites. Insecticides kill not just nuisance insects, but also good ones like bees and butterflies. Herbicides kill food sources that caterpillars need, thus harming the butterfly population, not to mention being bad for humans, too, and polluting water.

Among the chemicals to avoid are fertilizers. Most people overuse them and end up burning their plants — or worse still, inhaling or even touching them which can make you sick. Synthetic agricultural fertilizers also pollute creeks and groundwater.

So, taking a thoughtful, intentional approach to attracting wildlife to your garden can mean less maintenance, lower costs, and fewer powerful chemicals in your own habitat.

Now, where's that old garbage can lid....?

For more information

Interested in getting your garden certified as a bird-friendly habitat? Go to

<https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/4-tips-bird-friendly-habitat>

Penn State Extension has great ideas for your backyard:

<https://extension.psu.edu/plan-a-backyard-wildlife-habitat>

A word about cats and dogs: In the U.S. wild and pet cats and dogs kill millions of birds and other wildlife every year. If your pets roam outside, be careful to place your feeders and baths near tree cover, but not near shrubs where pets can hide and their natural instincts can lead to mayhem.

Clean Water Is Up to You is a series published by Brodhead Watershed Association. See brodheadwatershed.org.



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