

Inviting Wildlife to Your Backyard

Even a suburban backyard can attract a surprising number of creatures including birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. Trees, shrubs, and other plants provide both food and shelter for wildlife. The types of plants used for food and cover help determine the wildlife species that will be drawn to your backyard.



There may be some wildlife you don't want to attract to your backyard such as deer. Deer populations are the largest in history and are adapting to areas heavily populated by humans. Although they are exciting to see, they can easily strip your shrubs and trees and cause other environmental damage as well. When you purchase nursery stock, check with your salesperson to make sure that the species you are interested in are not "deer candy."

Putting up birdhouses and bird feeders can invite an array of colorful birds as regular visitors. However, bird feeders, besides attracting the species you want, may also attract species you don't want, such as English Sparrows, Starlings, Grackles, Crows and squirrels. Choose a location for birdhouses that birds will find appealing and secure, usually away from areas of frequent human activity.



This birdhouse is located at the CSCD constructed wetland at North East Middle School. Birdhouses like this one can be installed in your backyard to attract your favorite bird species.

From My Backyard to Our Bay

The birdhouse should be specifically designed for the bird species you wish to attract. The size of the entry hole is critical to accommodate the desired bird but keep out other larger species that might destroy eggs and young. Cats have a detrimental effect on the population of birds. Keeping cats inside instead of outside, may help attract birds to your backyard. Supply clean, fresh water nearby with a birdbath, saucer, or pond. All wildlife needs water.

Butterflies are attracted to a large variety of plants that produce nectar. Caterpillars, the larval stage of butterflies, need nourishment from different plants. Bees play a critical role in healthy wild plant communities (as well as gardens and agriculture) through pollination. About 30 percent of our diet is food produced through the pollination of fruits and vegetables. Use native plants in your garden to support pollinating insects as well as butterflies and birds. These plants provide the right food or nectar at the right time, and are generally well adapted to our local climate when planted in the right place.

Backyard ponds can be homes for fish, frogs, dragonflies, birds, butterflies, and many other creatures. A water feature is very effective in drawing wildlife to your backyard. Ponds and the landscaping around the ponds create an ecosystem of their own that is not only excellent habitat for wild creatures, but also a satisfying and relaxing place for you and your family. Research the correct location and construction of a small backyard pond and the equipment and plants that will keep it functioning properly. For a larger pond, engineered plans and permits will be required.



All wildlife is very vulnerable to the inappropriate use of many pesticides and other chemicals. Probably the single best thing a landowner can do for wildlife is to limit the use of chemicals and pesticides to an as needed basis and never exceed or ignore label instructions

Where To Get Help for attracting wildlife and solving wildlife problems

- Cecil Soil Conservation District; 410-398-4411 ext. 3; <http://www.cecilscd.com>
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Problems; http://dnr.maryland.gov/Wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/wildlifeproblems.aspx
- National Wildlife Federation; 1-800-822-9919; <http://www.nwf.org/backyard>
- USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Backyard Conservation https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/home/?cid=nrcs143_023574