

Maryland's Wild Acres – Wild-Scaping Townhouses and Condominiums

Backyard wildlife habitat does not have to be restricted to acres and acres of well-landscaped yards. This article is designed to give you ideas on how to turn your townhouse or condominium backyard into a wildlife garden with helpful tips on how to arrange food, water and shelter elements of habitat for wildlife. Once you've planned your wildlife garden, make sure your wildscape complies with townhouse and condominium guidelines before planting. Songbirds, hummingbirds, butterflies, bees, moths, squirrels, chipmunks, turtles and rabbits are just some of the wildlife species that will visit a townhouse or condominium wildscape.

Always be sure of the light, soil and watering requirements of each plant and whether or not those needs will be met in the place it will be planted. Plant nurseries and garden centers are good sources for plant care information. Use organic solutions to insect and disease problems instead of pesticides whenever possible.

Diversity is the Key

Most townhouse yards are comprised of grass with very little landscaping. The key to creating excellent wildlife habitat, regardless of the total size of the yard, is to offer a diverse habitat. Small trees and shrubs should form the "backbone" of the garden with lower growing annuals and perennials planted in front. Create a diversity of vertical habitat by planting groundcovers and arbors in addition to trees, shrubs and flowers. These plants form layers of habitat that are attractive to a greater number of wildlife species than if you just planted grass and trees. Also, select plants that do "double duty" in the wildlife garden by serving as food and shelter, which is especially important where space is limited.

How much grass should you keep? If you have children or pets, then some grass is necessary. A general rule of thumb is to have 60% or more of your yard area (excluding the house) planted in something other than grass. This rule is for the person who wants to retire their mower completely and incorporates a diverse blending of shrubs, annuals, perennials and vines in an arrangement that makes good use of available vertical space. Other vertical components adding dimension to the design include window boxes and a grape vine.

Habitat Elements

Food

Trees, shrubs and flowers represent important food components in the wildlife garden. Plants provide food in the fruit they produce, including seeds, berries, or nuts, or serve as food themselves. Plants should be chosen so that a variety of plants flower and fruit all season, which ensures a natural food supply will always be available to wildlife. Also, keep in mind the fruiting characteristics of plants. Inkberries and yews are dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers are on separate plants. If berries are desired as a food component then a male and female must be planted near each other. It's also imperative to prune these shrubs carefully and at the proper time of year to make sure you don't severely prune off your future food supply.

Annuals and perennials are excellent sources of nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies, bees and moths. After flowering, some annuals and perennials produce seeds that are enjoyed by songbirds. Be sure to select flower varieties that produce single rather than double flowers because singles are richer sources of nectar. Annuals, as a general rule, flower for a longer period than perennials and can provide vivid colors. Perennials should be chosen so that something is flowering throughout the season. Some of the best bee and butterfly plants are herbs, which when planted, can also add to your kitchen creations.

Water

Fresh water is probably the most important habitat element that you can add to your wildlife garden. There are many kinds of pedestal birdbaths commercially available. A ground birdbath placed in the garden with a circulating pump and mister may attract shy warblers and is a good choice for yards that aren't accessible to free-roaming predators (like cats). A shallow saucer or dish filled with fresh water does just as well. There are also birdbaths commercially available that can attach directly to porch and deck railings that are just as useful for birds to drink and bathe. A saucer filled with sand and kept wet provides water and nutrients for butterflies and toads too!

Shelter

Evergreen trees and shrubs and bushy or thorny deciduous shrubs can provide shelter for wildlife, even when planted next to the house in a foundation bed. Depending on the shrub, birds may even nest in it. Wildlife need shelter from the weather and safe places to rest and nest away from predators. Planting evergreens near feeders can provide year-round shelter for birds.

A grape arbor provides a nice shady retreat for both you and wildlife. In addition to these plant components, bird nesting boxes also provide important shelter for many wildlife species to raise their young. Roosting boxes provide safe places for resting and protection from the elements. If you have a shady spot with some space, then consider adding a [toad abode](#) to the landscape.

Recommended Plant List

The following list provides some recommendations for wildlife friendly plants. When selecting plants, keep in mind the size of your space as well as soil and light requirements for the plants you install. Also, be an informed consumer and stay away from plants that are known to be invasive. For a list of commonly planted invasive species, check out the [“Bad Plants Planted by Good People”](#) page.



Sunflowers are great for butterflies.

Annuals

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Cosmos	N	Jun-Aug	Attractive to bees and butterflies
Flowering Tobacco <i>(Nicotiana glauca)</i>	N	May-Jul	Attractive to bees, butterflies and birds.
Hollyhocks <i>(Alcea spp.)</i>	N		Attractive to bees and butterflies; biennial
Pentas <i>(Pentas spp.)</i>	N	Jun-Sept	Nectar attracts bees, butterflies, birds
Petunia <i>(Petunia spp.)</i>	N	Apr-Jul	Can attract butterflies like Painted ladies
Salvia <i>(Salvia spp.)</i>	N	May-Sep	Great for beneficial insect pollinators
Sunflowers <i>(Helianthus annuus)</i>	N	Jun-Aug	Attracts butterflies, bees, beneficial insects, birds and small mammals
Sweet William/Phlox <i>(Phlox divaricata)</i>	Y	Apr-Jun	Showy spring flower that attracts butterflies
Sweet William <i>(Dianthus barbatus)</i>	N	Jun-Jul	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds
Zinnia	N		Pentas are favorites of bees and butterflies



- Gene Cooley
Wild Oats produce attractive fruits while also providing cover for wildlife.

Grasses

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Big Bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>)	Y	Jun-Sep	Clump forming plant which provides cover
Eastern Gamagrass (<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>)	Y	Jun-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides cover and seeds for wildlife
Indiangrass (<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides cover
Little bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides cover and seeds for wildlife
Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)	Y	Jul-Oct	Clump forming plant which provides food for sparrows and other songbirds
Wild Oats (<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>)	Y	Jul-Sep	Provides cover



Black swallowtail larvae use plants from the Carrot family as larval hosts.
Photo by: Lynn Davidson

Herbs*

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Dill (<i>Anethum graveolens</i>)	N		Host for Black swallowtail larvae
Fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>)	N		Host for Black swallowtail larvae
Rosemary (<i>Rosemaryinus officinalis</i>)	N		Good for bees
Sweet Marjoram (<i>Origanum vulgare</i>)	N		Good for bees
Thyme (<i>Thymus</i>)	N		Excellent for bees

* **Note:** many herbs can be aggressive in the garden, so it is best to plant them in containers



Beebalm is great for attracting hummingbirds.

Perennials

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Beebalm (<i>Monarda didyma</i>)	Y	Jul-Sep	Showy, aromatic flowers which attract hummingbirds and butterflies
Beardtongue (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>)	Y	Jun-Aug	Great for hummingbirds
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)	Y	Jun-Oct	Provides both a pollen and nectar source for wildlife
Blazingstar (<i>Liatris spicata</i>)	Y	Jul-Aug	Nectar source for butterflies and beneficial insect; grows in dry soil
Butterflyweed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	Y	May-Jul/ Aug-Nov	Host plant for monarch butterflies. Also attracts adult butterflies
Common Milkweed (<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>)	Y	May-Jun/ Aug-Nov	Host plant for butterflies; fragrant and attracts beneficial insects
Ironweed (<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>)	Y	Aug-Oct	Host plant for butterflies
Joe Pyeweed (<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>)	Y	Jul-Oct	Attracts songbirds, butterflies and beneficial insects; great for rain gardens

Larkspurs (<i>Delphinium</i> spp).	Y/N	Apr-Jun	Provides nectar for butterflies and beneficial insects
Partridgeberry (<i>Mitchella repens</i>)	Y	May-Jul/ Jul-Dec	Groundcover that provides berries for birds and small mammals
Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpureum</i>)	Y	Jul-Aug	Provides nectar for pollinators as well as seeds for birds
Stonecrops (<i>Sedum</i> spp.)	Y/N		Provides good groundcover and some varieties are used by butterflies
Wild Columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)	Y	Apr-Jul	Great for butterflies, hummingbirds and beneficial insects



Winterberry holly provides a winter-long berry source for wildlife.

Shrubs

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Blueberries (<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.)	Y/N		Provide berry source for birds as well as nectar source for butterflies and bees
Coralberry (<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i>)	Y	Apr-Jun	Provides cover, nectar for insects, berries for songbirds and leaves for moths
Dogwoods (<i>Cornus</i> spp.)	Y/N		Provides cover and berries for birds and small mammals
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)	Y	May Jun-Jul	Fragrant flowers and berries important for songbirds and small mammals
Hydrangea (<i>Hydrangea</i> spp.)	Y/N	Jun-Aug	Provides cover and food for pollinators
Inkberry (<i>Ilex glabra</i>)	Y	May-Jun/ Sep-Mar	Provides cover and berries for songbirds and small mammals; need a male and female for berries
Juniper (dwarf varieties)	N		Provides year-round shelter
Rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron maximum</i>)	Y	May-Aug Sep-Nov	Provides year-round shelter for wildlife

Virginia Sweetspire <i>(Itea virginica)</i>	Y	Jun-Jul/ Aug-Mar	Provides nectar for beneficial insects and fruit for songbirds and small mammals
Winterberry <i>(Ilex verticillata)</i>	Y	Jun-Jul/ Aug-Feb	Provides cover and berries for songbirds and small mammals; need a male and female for berries
Yew <i>(Taxus canadensis)</i>	Y	Mar-May/ Jul-Sep	Provides cover and berries for songbirds



- R. H. Wegand

Fringetree has fragrant flowers and is attractive to songbirds.

Small Trees

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
American holly <i>(Ilex opaca)</i>	Y	May-Jun	Provides year-round cover and berries for songbirds
Fire Cherry <i>(Prunus pennsylvanica)</i>	Y	May/ Jul-Sep	High wildlife value for birds and mammals

Fringetree (<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>)	Y	May-Jun/ Sep-Oct	Fragrant flowers and attractive to songbirds
Mountain Ash (<i>Sorbus americana</i>)	Y	May-Jul/ Aug-Dec	High wildlife value for songbirds and small mammals
Paw-paw (<i>Asimina triloba</i>)	Y	Apr-Jun/ Aug-Sep	Produces edible fruits favored by birds, mammals and people
Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	Y	Mar-May/ May-Jun	Used by 58 species of wildlife in MD; berries are edible to songbirds, mammals and people



- Kerry Wxted
Trumpet Creeper is often visited by Hummingbirds.

Vines

Species	Native?	Flower/Fruit	Benefits
Bittersweet (<i>Celastrus scandens</i>)	Y	May-Jun/ Sept-Dec	Provides fruits, buds and leaves. Excellent winter food for birds. Oriental bittersweet (<i>C. orbiculatus</i>) is invasive.
Passionflower (<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>)	Y	Jun-Sep/ Sep-Oct	Great for butterflies and provides edible fruits

Trumpet Creeper (<i>Campsis radicans</i>)	Y	Jul-Sep/ Aug-Mar	Great for butterflies and hummingbirds
Trumpet Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>)	Y	Apr-Oct/ Aug-Mar	Excellent plant for hummingbirds and provides berries for songbirds
Virgin's Bower (<i>Clematis virginiana</i>)	Y	Jul-Sept/ Aug-Nov	Fragrant flowers
Wild Grape (<i>Vitis</i> spp.)	Y/N		Provides berries for wildlife

For Additional Information, Contact:

Sarah Witcher
Wildlife and Heritage Service
580 Taylor Ave, E-1
Annapolis, MD 21401
sarah.witcher1@maryland.gov
Phone: 410-260-8566



Acknowledgements:

Wild Oats photo by Gene Cooley
Black swallowtail caterpillar photo by Lynn Davidson
Fringetree photo by R. H. Wiegand
All other photos by Kerry Wixted