



HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY.** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

Write to Me!

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Native Plant Profile... Spice Bush (*Lindera benzoin*)

Spice Bush, also known as Benjamin-bush, Fever Bush, Snapwood, Spicewood, and Wild Allspice, is a deciduous shrub with a spicy scent. One of the first spring blooms in the woods, it is a member of the Laurel family .

Height: 6' - 15' **Spread:** 6' - 12'



Leaf: Smooth, thick, oblong, light green, toothless, alternate in location. Aromatic when crushed.

Flowers: Green to yellow, appearing before the leaves in March and April. Small about 1/10" in length. Some flowers are female, some male. Fragrant. Although small, blooms in clusters give a larger effect. One of the first spring blooms in the woods.



Fruit: Oval in shape, 1/2" long, matures in the fall, turning from green to red when ripe. Aromatic. It is a fleshy, aromatic drupe. Hidden until the leaves drop.

Bark: Brown to gray brown and speckled with light colored lenticels

Growing Conditions: Can tolerate full sun to partial shade

Pests: No serious insect or disease problems.



Habitat: Found in moist woodlands and by streams, Spice Bush can be planted as an ornamental in yards. Note: If planting, make sure to plant both male and female plants to insure seed production. Can be planted as a hedge.

Wildlife Value: Leaves serve as the food source for the larva of both the Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly and Tiger Swallowtail. The larva feed primarily on leaves at night and can be found at the underside of leaf.

Fruit Serves as Food for: Catbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Robin, Veery, Wood Thrush, Red-Eyed Vireo, Quail, and White-Throated Sparrows

Landscaping Notes: Low Maintenance, Good shrub to plant in a woodland garden, leaves in fall turn lemon yellow

Did you know? Early settlers considered the location of this plant as a sign of fertile soil. The twigs and leaves were used for tea and the dried berries were ground and used for spice in colonial times.

Maryland Wildlife: Groundhog (*Marmota monax*)



Description:

- Sexes look alike.
- Can get to 27" in length including a 6" dark brown tail.
- Females are slightly smaller at 22" and often appear lighter in color
- Has compact, chunky body with short legs.
- Front feet have long curved claws allowing it to dig burrows.
- Color of fur is brown-gray, sometimes grizzled. Occasionally albino groundhogs can be found.
- Eyes, small ears and nose are located toward the top of the head, which allows them to view looking out of the burrow while remaining hidden.
- Slow runner but can get get to its den when alerted.

Food: Plant material including clover, soybeans, grasses, vegetables. Will climb trees to get to apples and peaches. Will sometimes eat insects. Early morning and just before sunset are the preferred feeding times.

Habitat: Prefers open land, such as farmland. Burrows are located in fields, pastures, along fence rows, roads or the base of a tree. Burrows have a large mound of dug soil at the main hole. The opening is 10 to 12 inches in diameter. There are always two or more entrances to each groundhog home. Some of the other entrances are dug from below the ground so do not have dirt next to them. The burrow system serves as home to the animal for hibernating, hiding, mating and raising young.

Life Span: Usually 1 year, but can live as long as 5 in the wild

Status in Maryland: Common

Natural History: Also known as Woodchuck or Whistle Pig, this member of the rodent family is a true hibernator, usually starting at the end of October to November and emerging in early spring - late February or early March, when a male will begin to look for a mate. Groundhog litters are produced in April, usually consisting of 4 to 5 blind and naked young. Young leave their mother after 2 months. Groundhog are solitary except when mating and raising young. They are active in the daylight hours. When not eating, the groundhog likes to sun bathe.

Vocals: Can whistle if alarmed; will chatter teeth, hiss, squeal or growl when angry.

Did You Know? Ground hog dens provide homes for opossums, raccoons, skunks and foxes. Rabbits will use the dens as escape cover.

Note: Ground hogs can cause damage to backyard plantings and building foundations. If you are having problems you should consult your state wildlife department. For Maryland residents contact the wildlife hot line at 1-877-463-6497



Providing Nest Material for Songbirds

Our backyard songbirds provide their own nesting material. However, in many urban areas it is harder for some birds to find the appropriate items.

It can be an interesting activity to provide nesting materials and observe the birds actively collecting and using them. This is also a fun way to introduce children to bird watching.

Three ways to present the nesting material:

1. place in wire suet hangers
2. place in the crevice of a tree
3. place inside hanging berry baskets
(attaching baskets on a sturdy limb out of reach of cats and dogs)

Items to include as nesting material:

- Dog hair
- Cotton balls
- Grass
- Pine needles
- Yarn and String

The yarn and string should be cut into sections between 4" to 8" in length.

You may also want to provide a muddy site nearby, as robins, wood thrushes, phoebes and swifts will use mud as well when constructing a nest.

Avoid offering sharp items.

Do not use dryer lint. This material dries out poorly and thus provides poor insulation for a nest.

We would like to hear how successful you were with this activity. So, if possible, send us a picture or e-mail about an oriole, robin or other songbird using the material you provided.

For additional spring activities for children in nature, visit DNR's [Children in Nature](#) website.

Flower Pounding for Children



Try this activity with the children, for a fun, easy and fairly mess-free nature art project.

You Will Need:

- White fabric or T-shirts: If possible obtain fabric that is labeled PFD – prepared for dyeing, quilt squares and white bandannas are nice choices for this.
- Fresh flowers: Any flower that flattens keeping their shape is a better choice. Pansies, phlox and geraniums work well. Flowers with thick petals such as tulips tend to smear. White flowers do not print. Many flowers, such as roses need to have each petal removed and placed on the fabric in the desired shape, stems and flower centers should also be removed to make for easier printing.
- Rubber mallet or household hammer
- Wax paper

Directions:

1. Place wax paper on table.
2. Place fresh flowers on top of the waxed paper.
3. Place the white cotton material you want to be printed over the flower covered area.
4. Take the rubber mallet or hammer and gently pound on the cloth over the top of the area where the flower color is coming through the material.
5. You should wipe the hammer when going from one color of flower to another to keep the colors from smearing.
6. Hammer all the flower areas until the entire area is worked.
7. Remove fabric and allow it to dry.



You can set the printed images by soaking the fabric in a mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of house hold salt to 8 to 10 cups of water for at least 15 minutes.

The fabric can be washed in cold water, but do not use bleach or strong detergent.

Note: Flower pigment will fade over time, especially with exposure to sunlight.

If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

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 - Photograph of Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly larva (*Papilio troilus Linnaeus*), courtesy of Lacy L. Hyche, Auburn University, Bugwood.org
 - Photograph of Woodchuck denning in tree trunk, courtesy of PGC/Jacob Dingle
 - Illustration of pounded flowers, iStock Image.
 - Photograph of Phlox divaricata (Polemoniaceae), courtesy of G. A. Cooper, Plant Image Collection Search, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History
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Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Patty Allen at 410-260-8537, or send e-mail to: pallen@dnr.state.md.us

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

In an effort to continue to provide quality backyard habitat information we are asking our readers to tell us what you think. Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. This will help us to improve our site so we can continue to deliver the information you want.

[Habichat Reader's Survey](#)

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