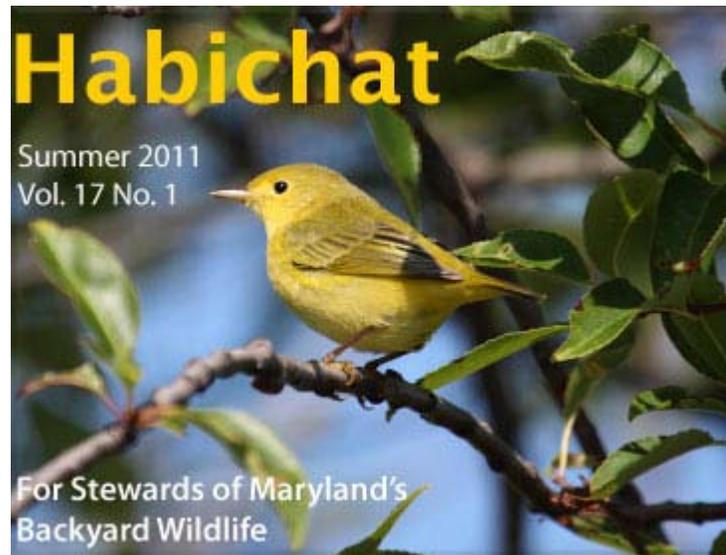


## Maryland's Wild Acres



***HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - IS THE KEY.***

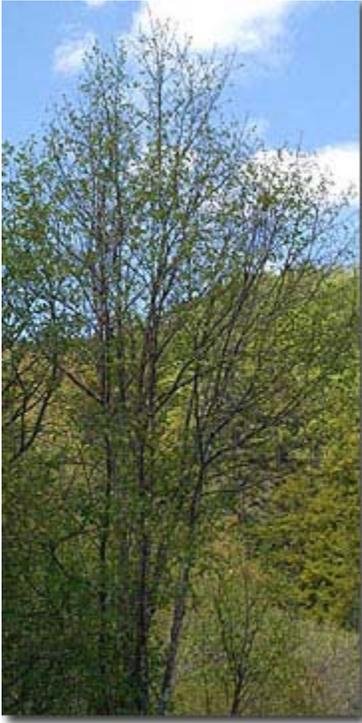
### ***In This Issue***

Native Plant Profile: Speckled Alder

Maryland Wildlife: Yellow Warblers

Time for Toad Abodes

Backyard Wildlife Fun for Kids - Backyard Bingo



## Native Plant Profile.....Speckled alder (*Alnus incana ssp. rugosa*)

Alders are under-recognized in the world of nursery plants. These native shrubs grow in semi-wet areas along streams and in floodplains. If you have a slightly wet spot in your yard, then this is a great plant to add!

Speckled alders are named for their reddish-brown bark which contains “speckles” also known as lenticels. Lenticels are used for gas exchange by plants.

Speckled alders have oval to elliptic leaves that alternate on either side of the branch. These leaves have two sets of “teeth” on the edges with 9-12 nearly straight, parallel veins.

Speckled alders, like other alders, have both male and female flowers on the tree. The male, pollen-producing flowers are also known as catkins and hang down in a drooping fashion. In contrast, the female flowers are cone-like, sit upright and generally remain on the shrub throughout the year.

While Speckled alders have no commercial value, speckled alders are important for other plants and wildlife.

The roots of Speckled alders have tiny nodules which house bacteria that put extra nitrogen in the soil. This helps provide nutrients to other plants living around the alders. In addition, Speckled alder thickets provide cover for White-tailed deer, rabbits and even songbirds like Yellow warblers.

Beavers, muskrats and rabbits have also been known to browse alder twigs while American goldfinches, Grouse, Woodcock and an assortment of songbirds are known to eat the seeds, buds and catkins.

### ***Speckled alders are excellent for erosion control, especially along stream banks where soil is frequently disturbed.***

Chippewa Indians regularly used alder root scrapings with powdered bumblebees to produce a concoction for women experiencing difficult childbirth. Alder bark tea was also used in the past to treat diarrhea.

While the medicinal uses for alder have not been verified, the wildlife, plant and landscape benefits have.

This shrub will grow in a variety of soil types from sand to clay and can tolerate frequent flooding and variable light from full sun to shade.

Speckled alder is a fantastic addition to any setting, from your backyard to a wild area.



Speckled alder

Left to Right:  
Fruit, Twig, Leaf

## Maryland Wildlife.....Yellow Warblers



Yellow warblers are small, brightly colored songbirds with thin, pointed bills. Their overall appearance is a bright yellow (hence, the name!). Males also tend to have chestnut streaks on their chests. Yellow warblers use their thin bills to catch a variety of insect and spider species. However, in the fall and winter, they will also consume seeds and berries.

This species of warbler can be found in open woodlands throughout Maryland and nesting in shrubs during late spring and summer. Yellow warblers, like other warbler species, are Neotropical migrants. Neotropical migrants overwinter in places like Mexico, Central and South America before returning to points north in the early spring.

Like many songbird species, nests of Yellow warblers are often parasitized by Brown-headed cowbirds. Brown-headed cowbirds are brood parasites which lay their eggs in nests made by other bird species. Once the cowbird chicks hatch, Yellow warblers or other parasitized bird species will feed and take care of the cowbird chicks at the expense of their own young. However, Yellow warblers have a tendency to build a new nest right on top of the parasitized one! Sometimes these nests will consist of two to six tiers. After nests have been built, the females will incubate the eggs for approximately two weeks. Once the chicks have hatched they fledge (leave the nest) in approximately two weeks.

Yellow warblers have a variable, high pitched call. The mnemonic for Yellow warblers is "*Sweet, sweet, sweet, I'm-so-sweet.*"

To attract Yellow warblers and other warbler species to your yard plant native shrubs and offer suet in early spring and the fall. Yellow warblers prefer dense shrubs like alders and willows which are typically found in slightly wet environments. Suet is a great high-energy substitute for insects, and it can be smeared on a tree or placed in a suet cage. Warblers also prefer to have a running water source, such as a fountain. However, if you do not have a fountain, then a simple bird bath will do.



## Time for Toad Abodes

Toads get a bad rap. Their warty appearance isn't always appreciated, but did you know that one adult toad eats about 10,000 insect pests in one summer?!

To entice toads to help out your yard, you need to provide a castle fit for a Toad King, also known as a Toad Abode. Toad Abodes come in a variety of styles—from miniature castles to cottages. Many commercial stores sell Toad Abodes, but these can come at a price. An alternative would be to make your own Toad Abode to fit your style and budget.

One of the simplest ways of building a Toad Abode is to take an eight inch or larger Terra-Cotta pot and bury it half-way on its side. Make sure to place loose soil and leaves inside the pot to allow your toady friends to burrow in it. Another option would be to take a pot and cut a doorway in it wide enough for a toad to get through. Remember, toads don't exactly have slim waists! Flip the pot upside down and bury the rim just a little to anchor it. Viola! Instant toad haven! You can decorate your Abode to fit your needs by painting it or gluing rocks to it. The design is completely up to you!

Regardless of whether you purchase a Toad Abode or design your own, there are a few rules for the plans and placement of the new pads.



For one, keep your toad paradise in a shady spot as toads like cool, damp areas. Also, make sure the entrance of the abode is wide enough for your portly friends. In Maryland, the likely toad tenants are Fowler's toads and American toads. Both species need a doorway at least three inches wide. Toad Abodes also should be bottomless to allow toads to burrow in the soil, or should have an area they can dig and burrow in. Having an escape route or second door on the abodes is preferred to allow the toads to flee potential predators. One option would be to make a long housing unit that allows toads to hop to the back for safety.

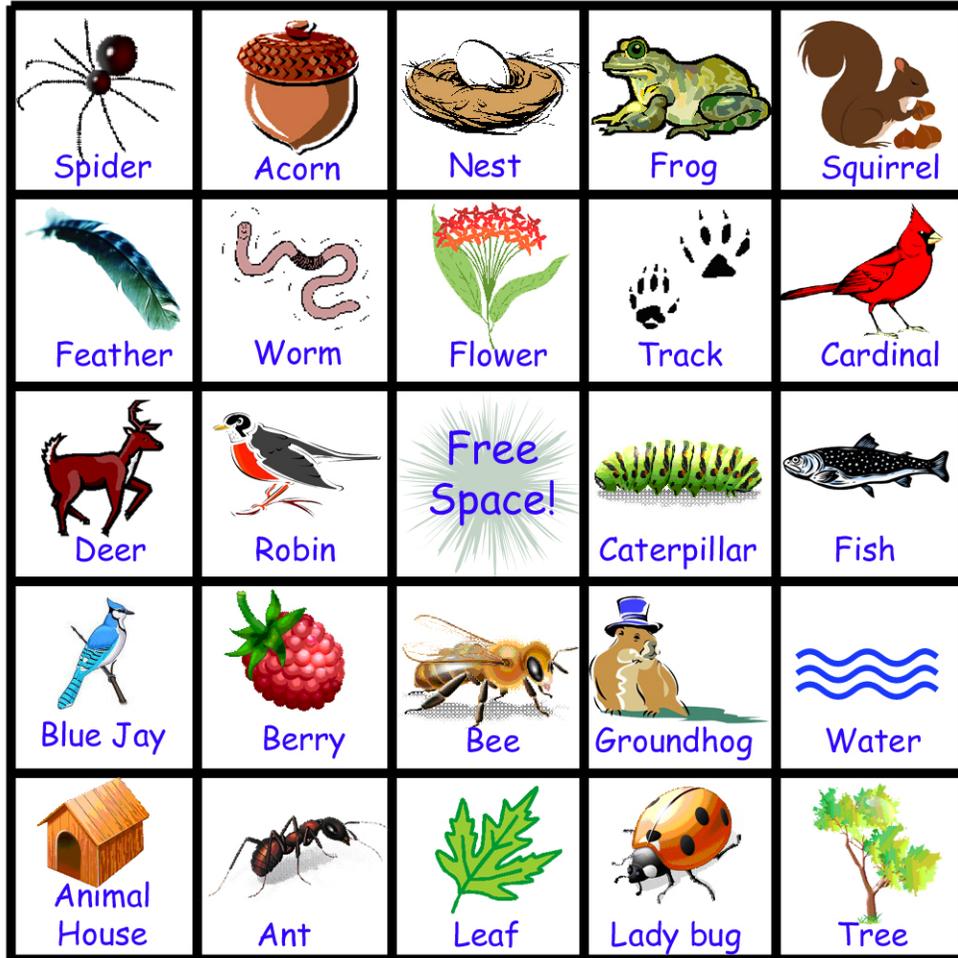
Toad Abodes should also be placed near a shallow water source. Something as shallow as a Terra-Cotta saucer will do. Your abode should also be placed AWAY from areas that your critters frequent. Toads secrete a toxic substance to avoid predators. If your cat or dog grabs one, then they will be in for a mouth-foaming surprise. While unpleasant, secretions from Maryland toads will not kill your family pets. Out West, some species of toads are a bit deadlier.

A final tip for successful toad habitat is to not use lawn chemicals or pesticides. Not only will these harmful substances kill your toad's food sources (insects) but also these chemicals will be absorbed by the toad's permeable skin.

For more information on Maryland's frogs and toads, then please visit the Maryland DNR's frog and toad page here: [http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/Plants\\_Wildlife/herps/Anura/fieldguide\\_OrderAnura.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/Plants_Wildlife/herps/Anura/fieldguide_OrderAnura.asp)

## Backyard Wildlife Fun for Kids - Backyard Bingo

# Backyard Bingo!



*It is time to get outside and have some fun!  
This is outdoorsy spin on an old favorite game.*

## Acknowledgements:

- Photograph of Speckled Alder Tree form, courtesy of VA Tech Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation\*
- Photograph of Speckled alder flower courtesy of Jerry A. Payne, Bugwood.org
- Photograph of Speckled alder twig & shoot, courtesy of Bill Cook, Michigan State University; Bugwood.org
- Speckled Alder Photo Collage, courtesy of VA Tech Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation\*
- Photograph of Yellow Warbler, courtesy of Mikey Lutmerding
- Photograph of Yellow Warbler Nest, courtesy of Jeff Tome
- Photograph of American Toad, courtesy of Kerry Wixted
- Photograph of Toad House, courtesy of Brenda Davis.

**\*Please Note:** Copyright 2010, VA Tech Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, all rights reserved. Photos courtesy of: John R. Seiler, Edward C. Jensen, John A. Peterson, Michael Aust, John Baily, Claude L. Brown, Bruce Bongarten, Susan D. Day, Richard E. Kreh, Larry H. McCormick, Alex X. Niemiera, Oana Popescu, David W. Smith, Kim C. Steiner, James E. Ward, Rodney E. Will, Shephard M. Zedaker.

---

## 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.

## Write to Me!

Kerry Wixted  
Natural Resources Biologist II  
Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service  
MD Dept of Natural Resources  
580 Taylor Ave., E-1  
Annapolis MD 21401  
phone: 410-260-8566  
fax: 410-260-8596  
e-mail: [kwixted@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:kwixted@dnr.state.md.us)

Habichat, the newsletter for Maryland's Stewards of Backyard Wildlife, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

The facilities and services of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, physical or mental disability. This document is available in alternative format upon request from a qualified individual with a disability.