

For Stewards of Maryland's Backyard Wildlife

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Habichat

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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.

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941

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Native Plant Profile.....Coralberry, (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*)

A small shrub in the snowberry family found growing on a variety of sites from dry and rocky to moist and rich. Averages three feet tall and grows in sun or shade. Though not showy, the flowers produce nectar that attracts Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and is a nectar source for bees. The berries persist into winter.

Flowers/Fruits: Flowers are small greenish-purple bells clustered in the axils of the leaves from July to August. Showy purplish-red berries in September and persist into winter.

Landscape Notes: An excellent example of a multi-use wildlife plant that also is extremely versatile in the landscape. Brightly colored fruits make this shrub a showstopper. Shrub's habit of forming dense thickets makes it useful for shrub

borders, naturalizing, and low screens. Useful in bank stabilization and has been planted along highways to control bank erosion. It is a fast-growing shrub that tolerates city smoke. Also can be incorporated into foundation plantings and container gardens.



Coralberries are food for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite, Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Nectar), Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Warbling Vireo, Cardinal, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, and Pine Grosbeak.

Leaves are eaten by the Hummingbird Clearwing and Snowberry Clearwing moth caterpillars. These day-flying moths are often seen drinking nectar from flowers, hovering like hummingbirds.

Coralberry is cover for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wood Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Cardinal, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeak.

Additional Notes: Coralberry is also called Indian Currant, or Buckbrush. Native Americans use the slender stems to weave baskets. Deer eat this plant less than many other native plants. Coralberry is one of the best shrubs you can plant to attract Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. This shrub is particularly suited for small gardens. The plant has few pests or diseases.



Maryland Wildlife: Baltimore Oriole

Baltimore (Northern) Orioles were named because their striking orange and black plumage resembled the coat of arms colors of Sir George Calvert, 1st Baron of Baltimore.

Baltimore Orioles are grouped with birds known as Neotropical migrants, birds that breed in North America and winter in Central and South America. Most neotropical migrants are declining due to forest habitat loss and fragmentation in all three Americas. Baltimore Orioles rarely winter in Maryland, but can be attracted to backyard feeders in the summer. Look for the migrating orioles to return to Maryland in March through April.

Feeding Habits

- Eats caterpillars (including fall webworm, tent and gypsy moth caterpillars), beetles, scale insects, woodborers, aphids, sawfly larvae, grasshoppers, and others.
- Supplements insect diet with fruit. Preferred food trees and shrubs include serviceberry, apple (seeds), mulberry, cherry, blueberry, American mountain ash, and blackberry.
- Drinks nectar in summer. Particularly attracted by flowers such as scarlet trumpet honeysuckle called “Dropmore”, hollyhock, rose of Sharon, wood lily, turk’s cap lily and tiger lily.

Nesting Habits

- Breeds throughout Maryland in large trees in open areas along country roads, in towns, or edges of woods near streams.
- Favorite nest and shelter trees include maples, birches, and apples, black cherry, and oaks.
- Builds a sturdy pendulous pouch nest.
- Will accept short pieces of colored yarn (no longer than four inches) for nest building.
- Lays four to six eggs in May through June.
- Oriole young hatch twelve to fourteen days later and leave the nest twelve to fourteen days after hatching.
- Can be enticed to nest in backyards with the appropriate habitat.

Backyard Tips

- In the summer, offer apples, grapefruits, oranges, and bananas on spikes or platform feeders.
- Orioles will drink from hummingbird or oriole feeders as long as perches are present within reach of feeders.
- Can also make an oriole feeder from a hamster water bottle.
- In winter, early spring, offer suet, suet mixtures, peanut butter, grape jelly, halved fruit, raisins, cracked corn, millet, and pecan meats.
- Takes food from bird tables, trays, hanging feeders, logs, and suet holders.
- Offer water.



Population Status

- Baltimore Orioles have declined significantly in the eastern U.S.
- In Maryland, the decline may approach a rate of 2% annually.



Want to know an easy way to attract butterflies to your backyard?

Offer rotten fruit- the juicier the better!

Many species of butterflies will not nectar at backyard flowers and offering fruit is a great way to see spectacular butterflies up close.

There are commercial butterfly feeders filled with sugar water, but not all species will use them. Try to mimic what happens in nature.

One of the easiest things to try first is to take an unpeeled banana and make slits in the skin. Then place the banana in a closed container outside. The bananas need to get liquefied so it is easier for the butterflies to sip. Keeping the skin on helps keep the banana from drying out. When the bananas are gushy enough, put the bananas on a flat board that is attached to a pole near a window. This way you can easily watch the butterflies without disturbing them.

Bananas seem to be the best fruit to use for general use. Watermelons attract Mourning Cloaks and Question Marks. Rotting pear juice is a favorite for Admirals. Oranges, limes, lemons, grapefruit, apples, mangoes and persimmons also produce sugary liquids when rotting.

Butterflies that have been seen using banana boards in Maryland are as follows: Comma, Red-spotted Purple, Buckeye, Red Admiral, Mourning Cloak, Hackberry Emperor, Tawny Emperor, Question Mark, Viceroy, Common Wood Nymph, Variegated Fritillary, Painted Lady and Compton Tortoiseshell.

Feeders should be monitored to make sure butterflies do not get stuck and die where juice has evaporated.

Butterfly Fruit Mash Recipe

You can create a fruit mash to spread on rocks, or tree trunks that will attract feeding butterflies.

Mash any fruit with a sugar source (Sugar, molasses, corn syrup, or honey) and let it sit for a few hours then set it out for the butterflies.



Ingredients

One pound of sugar
One mashed banana
One cup of molasses or syrup
One cup of fruit juice

Smear your mash out on the surface you choose. Butterflies like the sunlight, but the mash dries out more quickly in direct sunlight. A semi-sunny area works best. A good idea is to spread it somewhere where you can hose it off later. It can get pretty gross after a couple of days and loses its ability to attract butterflies. Also remember there are many other insects that are attracted to the fruit, and are also interesting to watch.

Don't forget to provide some water nearby for the butterflies to drink. They are attracted to open water. A long narrow dish with moist soil seems to work best for their water source.

Habitat Savvy Lawn Care

Studies estimating lawn surface area across the country reveal that 25-30 million acres are found in the country's urban- suburban landscape. That's a lot of grass. Water quality and bay cleanup efforts often target agricultural practices as a primary culprit, however, what we homeowners put in and on our lawns can have a cumulative impact on the bay as well.



The good news is that you can reduce lawn chores, improve water quality AND create healthy backyard habitats for wildlife. Carole Ann Barth of the Center for Watershed Protection outlines eight key steps towards decreasing the amount of time, money, fertilizer, pesticides and water needed to maintain lawns. Many of these practices are compatible and easily teamed with wildlife habitat goals.

Step 1: Lawn conversion – Some lawn is necessary for high traffic areas, children play areas, and pet exercise areas. Once you've identified these areas, select projects to convert 60% or more of your lawn into habitat such as meadows, butterfly gardens, hummingbird gardens, salamander habitats, or water gardens. A 1993 study of simulated rainfall found that natural landscaping such as meadows or mulched areas strongly reduced storm water runoff even with rainfall totaling 3.7 inches.

Step 2: Soil building – Take soil tests every 3 years to determine pH, fertility, and soil texture (sandy, clay, loam) of lawn areas. Sandy and clay soils do not produce healthy lawns. Also, count earthworms. Healthy soils have over 10 worms per square foot. Knowing these facts about your lawn soil will aid you in improving soil conditions resulting in better grass growth. Healthy earthworm populations also feed birds.

Step 3: Grass selection – Select grasses that grow well in your area. New low-input, slow growing, dwarf grass varieties make lawn care and maintenance easier. Buffalo grass is a warm season, low growing, prairie grass that has excellent drought – tolerance and good insect and cold tolerance.

Step 4: Mowing management – Mow grass to 3 inches or higher and leave grass clippings on the ground. The Rodale Institute of Research found that an acre of clippings provided 235 lbs. Of nitrogen, 210 lbs., of potassium and 77 lbs. of phosphorus which are the elements found in fertilizers. Rodale concluded that grass clippings could meet most of the nutrient requirements of any lawn.

Step 5: Minimal fertilization – If soil tests indicate that fertilizer is needed, apply commercial fertilizers at half the recommended rate to prevent leaching of excess nutrients. Apply fertilizers only when grass is actively growing- warm season grasses in the summer; cool season grasses in the in the fall. Make sure rain is not imminent. You can further minimize nutrient leaching by using an encapsulated, formulated or organic fertilizer that slowly releases nutrients over time. Compost can also build soil and provide beneficial soil microorganisms.

Step 6: Weed control and tolerance – Broaden your definition of lawn to include weeds that perform desirable functions. Legumes like clover can fix atmospheric nitrogen and grow where grasses may not perform well. Clovers produce abundant nectar attractive to butterflies. Weeds also provide habitat for beneficial insect predators. Ladybugs feed on dandelion pollen and clover.

Step 7: Reduce pesticide use – A 1994 survey of 500 Baltimore homes found 50 different herbicides, insecticides and fungicides were applied by residents or commercial applicators. Misuse of pesticides is one of the primary sources for pesticides migrating off lawns into streams. A review of 12 different studies found herbicides and insecticides are routinely present in urban runoff. The Baltimore study revealed one in thirteen residents apply pesticides themselves and tow thirds of the do-it your selfers said

they rinsed out sprayers over grass, pavement or directly into gutters or storm sewers. Pesticides drift on impervious surfaces and applying before rain are other sources for contamination. Two insecticides commonly found in urban storm water are diazinon and chlorpyrifos, and toxicity of these chemicals to terrestrial wildlife such as geese, songbirds, and amphibians is well documented. Homeowners with backyard habitats should rely on organic or integrated pest management methods whenever possible to address insect and disease problems.

Step 8: Sensible irrigation – water lawns infrequently but give them a through soaking. Be sure to water only as fast as the ground can soak it up or runoff will be created. The best time to water is in the early morning to guard against water loss through evaporation. During dry weather birds will utilize sprinklers. Cool season grass lawns that turn brown in the summer are simply dormant and not dead. The grass will turn green once cooler and wetter weather returns.

Acknowledgements:

Coralberry photographs courtesy of Steve Baskauf and 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/>

Photograph of female Baltimore Oriole perched on a hand courtesy of Deanna Dawson, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Photograph of male Baltimore Oriole perched on a hand courtesy of Chan Robbins, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The source for both of these photos is: Gough, G.A., Sauer, J.R., Iliff, M. *Patuxent Bird Identification Infocenter*. 1998. Version 97.1. Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD.

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/Infocenter/infocenter.html>

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.

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 Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@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

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