



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...

### Hickories

**(*Carya species*)**

Common Names: Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*), Shellbark Hickory (*Carya laciniosa*), Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*), Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*), Mockernut Hickory (*Carya tomentosa*),

Hickories are native trees of which 12 species are found wide spread in the Eastern North American Forest.

These tree species may be divided into 3 groups:

1. Shagbarks - When mature trunk bark peels in strips, large ½" long end buds, stout twigs and thick nut husks (Shagbark, Shellbark,)
2. Pignuts - Tight bark, small end buds, slender twigs and thin nut husks (Pignut, Mockernut, Bitternut)
3. Pecans - They have yellow, hairy buds, with 9 to 17 leaflets.

Note: These trees are a Southern species of the river bottoms when found in the wild. They will grow on uplands in Maryland, but will rarely produce a nut as far north as our state.



This article will cover the first two groups as they are what most people consider hickories.

**Height:** Trees may reach 50' to 80' on average with some reaching 120'.

**Spread:** When mature hickories produce excellent shade trees.

**Trunk Diameter:** Trees can reach 1' to 2' in diameter.



**Leaf:** Feathered compound leaves, toothed, pointed

- Shagbark - 5 to 7 leaflets
- Shellbark - 7 to 9 leaflets
- Pignut - 5 to 7 leaflets
- Bitternut - 5 to 11 leaflets
- Mockernut - 7 to 9 leaflets

**Bark:** Two hickories have loose bark; the others do not. When identifying hickories, bark helps but you need to also look at other characteristics, such as leaves and buds.

- Shagbark - Light colored, very shaggy, in long loose strips when mature
- Shellbark - Very shaggy, loosing in long strips
- Pignut - Dark, tight and smooth ridged
- Bitternut - Tight, fine smooth ridges
- Mockernut - Tight, smooth ridges

**Flower:** Self pollinating with both male and female flowers found on the same tree. Male flowers are large catkins 6" long. Female flowers are small and grow in clusters of five. Bloom in late April thru May.

**Fruit:** Called a nut. Most have a thick husked shell. Hickory nuts ripen in the early fall Sept. - Oct. and are valuable food for forest wildlife. Most can be eaten by humans except Bitternut.

- Shagbark - Egg shaped nuts, thick husk
- Shellbark - Egg shaped, no ridges but angled, thick husk
- Pignut - Egg shaped, thin shelled
- Bitternut - Nut is smooth, round, thin husk
- Mockernut - Ball shaped, thick husk

**Soil:** Rich, well-drained soil

**Sun:** Full is best; can tolerate some light shade when growing

**Pests:** Hickory shuckworm will attack nuts. Long horned beetles (called Twig Girdlers) will remove twigs. Consult your local extension office if you are experiencing damage to your trees.

**Wildlife Value:** Hickories are one of the most important native foods for forest dwelling mammals.

- Nuts - Wild Turkey, Wood Duck, Black Bear, Red and Gray Fox, Raccoon, Gray and Red Squirrels, Opossum, Blue Jay, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Bobwhite Quail
- Nuts and Flowers - Crows, Grosbeak species
- Nuts and Bark - Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
- Foliage, Twigs and Nuts - White-tailed Deer
- Indiana Bats will roost in the bark of Shagbark trees

**Landscaping Notes:** Excellent specimen tree. Leaves produce lovely fall colors. Wonderful shade tree. Very tolerant of construction and human activity.

**Did you know?**

- Hickories grow slowly, but can live for up to 200 years.
- Shellbark Hickories are grown commercially for nuts.
- Hickory wood is strong and used for tool handles and furniture.
- Wood is also excellent for fuel and charcoal.
- Hickory species often hybridize (interbreed) in the wild.

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## Maryland Wildlife: Gray Catbird

### *(Dumetella carolinensis)*

**Description:** A medium size song bird 8" to 9" in length. Slimmer than round, this bird has black legs, black cap, which is distinctive and black tail. The overall color of the bird is slate gray. Does have a chestnut-colored undertail. Sexes look alike.

**Food:** In the summer catbirds feed mainly on insects such as ants, beetles, caterpillars, grasshoppers, bugs and spiders. This bird feeds on them from shrubs or saplings rarely from the ground.

Catbirds probably eat more fleshy fruits than any of the other songbirds. Most fruit feeding is done within 10 feet from the ground. Preferred fruits are blackberry, cherry, Holly, Bayberry, Greenbrier, Elderberry, Grape, blueberry, Pokeweed, Serviceberry, Virginia creeper, Dogwood, Hackberry, Sassafras and Spicebush.

**Habitat:** Tangled vegetation, dense shrubbery, especially in moist areas. Likes residential areas that have abundant shrubbery.

#### Nesting:

- Birds breed from late April to early August with the peak from mid-May to June.
- The nests are found 4 to 8 feet from the ground in shrubs or vines.
- Both sexes help build the nest.
- Three to four eggs are laid with an incubation period of 12 days
- The young leave the nest 12 days after hatching.
- Catbirds produce 1 to 2 broods per season.
- Female incubates the eggs but the male does help raise the young.
- They will not use nest boxes.

**Vocalizations:** Catlike mewing, and a "check-check" noise; can also mimic like a Mockingbird, although does not repeat.

**Behavior:** Secretive, flying low over vegetation

**Range:** Usually found in Maryland from April to late October. Migrates to the southern U.S. and some as far as Panama (unlike the Mockingbird which is found throughout the year in Maryland).

**Did you know?** Catbirds consume many insects that are garden pests. They are in the same family, Mimidae, as Mockingbirds and Brown Thrashers.





## Creating a Backyard Pond for your Children

Water is essential for wildlife and when you add water, such as a small pond, nature comes to you. Children are attracted by “wet” and are eager to explore what can be found when water becomes part of the backyard landscape.

You can make a water garden for children the size of a dishpan. Bury a container to a few inches of the rim. You may also do this with a half of a wooden barrel. With the barrel you will want to line it with a flexible pool liner. Even a kiddie pool liner can be used.

Several small or one large native aquatic plant can be planted in a can that sits on bricks in the bottom of the barrel. Clean out the tiny pond occasionally by lifting out the plant and bricks, bailing out the water, and put everything back in and refill with dechlorinated water.

You may wish to keep some goldfish in the pond but make sure; since these fish are not native they cannot escape into a nearby stream. If you want to attract frogs to the site you should not place fish in the small pond as they will eat frog eggs and tad poles.

Shortly after you establish this pond, you will begin to notice aquatic insects such as water striders, showing up to use the aquatic area even if the nearest body of water is a mile away.

Soon you and your children may see dragonflies, songbirds, frogs and butterflies using your pond habitat. This offers a good opportunity for the children to take photos of what they see. Perhaps they may want to write a daily journal, on paper or online, about their pond observations.

If after having success with a small container pond, you decide to try a larger one, remember county and city laws often determine where a pond can be built and what liability issues you must deal with. Always remember NEVER leave small children alone around ponds, no matter how small the pond is.



Note: When temperatures drop below freezing bring the fish and plants indoors. In cold areas the dish pan or barrel would freeze solid and they would die.

For additional information on small ponds in the backyard check out our Wild Acres Article on the subject at [www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/waponds.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/waponds.asp).

The North American Water Garden Society has an excellent program called “Ponds for Kids” which helps parents and students build small aquatic ponds on school property to enhance aquatic studies. [www.nawgs.org](http://www.nawgs.org)

Want to help your children learn about frogs and help scientists?

Check out the The National Wildlife Federation’s “Frog Watch USA” website. [www.nwf.org/frogwatchUSA](http://www.nwf.org/frogwatchUSA)



## Landscaping for Wildlife with Rocks

Rocks can be part of your landscaping for wildlife. Large rocks, rock piles and old stone walls can serve as cover, especially as escape cover from predators for wildlife such as chipmunks, rabbits, snakes and lizards, such as skinks.

Large rocks in an open sunny area serve as an ideal location for cold-blooded species such as butterflies and reptiles to warm up on prior to their mid-day activities.

Chipmunks, other native rodents, and snakes prefer hard, sun-warmed homes. Many invertebrates will live under large rocks and in turn serve as food for many song birds, reptiles and mammals.

Many former farm fields have rock walls or a large rock pile in the corner. You may even have a natural rock outcropping on your land.

If you wish to make your own rock piles for wildlife try the following. The rocks should be placed in piles of varying sizes but no higher than 4 feet. Large rocks should be placed at the bottom with smaller ones on top.

Just don't throw rocks in a pile. Rock piles should also be grouped to provide maximum cover for animals. You may allow

vegetation to grow on the piles, but remember full sun is best for their location.

For additional information on providing escape cover for wildlife check our Wild Acres article on brush piles for wildlife [www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wabush.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wabush.asp)

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- Photograph of container pond, iStock photo
- Photograph of container pond, iStock photo
- Photograph of rock pile, iStock photo

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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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](mailto:pallen@dnr.state.md.us)

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the WindStar Wildlife Institute at [www.windstar.org](http://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](http://www.naba.org)

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit Pheasants Forever at [www.pheasantsforever.org](http://www.pheasantsforever.org) or e-mail: [pf@pheasantsforever.org](mailto:pf@pheasantsforever.org)

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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.

[Habitat Reader's Survey](#)

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