



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

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Forward

Welcome to the Fall Issue of Habi-Chat! Fall is my favorite time of year! In this issue, you can read about the colorful blue mistflower, our migratory Eastern Red Bats, how (and why!) to sow seeds in Fall, tips for recycling pumpkins, and how to report migratory monarchs.

While Fall may seem like a period of winding down for wildlife gardening, this is an important time for many species which are preparing for winter. Don't forget to leave the leaves for shelter and to provide Fall food sources to fuel migration and hibernation!

If there is a particular topic that you would like to see on our site, then please don't hesitate to contact me to let me know! My information can be found at the bottom of this newsletter. Happy Fall!

Don' t forget about Fall plant sales!

Check out the Maryland Native Plant Society website for Native Plant Sales near you!

(<http://www.mdflora.org/plantsales.html>)



Maryland Native Plant Profile:

Blue Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)

Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) is a native perennial flower in the Aster family (Asteraceae). During this time of year, its characteristic pastel purple-blue flowers can be seen dotting roadsides, fields, and backyards from August to October. The blooms will last 1-2 months. Blue mistflowers can be seen growing wild in just about every Maryland county.

Blue mistflower thrives in moist to wet soil in full sun to light shade. It does not do well in droughts. Early in the season, its growth can appear weedy, but its Fall colors makes up for its unappealing early season look. Blue mistflowers can grow up to 36 inches tall and can spread just as far, but most plants are much smaller. The leaves are opposite, are slightly triangular in shape, and sport blunt teeth. The flowers are tiny disks that get up to ¼ inch long. Flowers are arranged in flat-topped clusters, and pollinated flowers will turn into tufted fruits distributed by the wind.



Blue mistflowers are late-season butterfly favorites, often attracting monarchs, sulphurs, buckeyes, and more. Long and short-tongued bees, flower flies, moths, and beetles all can be found nectaring on blue mistflower. Caterpillars such as the clymene moth and lined ruby tiger moth will dine on its foliage. Few mammalian herbivores will take a bite, however, as the leaves are bitter to the taste.

Mistflowers are supported by a dense system of underground rhizomes which allows them to sometimes vigorously spread in prime growing locations. Nevertheless, it is an easy plant to remove.



An orange sulphur (left) and American lady (right) enjoy blue mistflower by Ken Slade, Flickr CC

Maryland Native Wildlife

Eastern Red Bat (*Lasiurus borealis*)

As the temperatures drop, many Maryland wildlife begin to prepare for winter. While most of our 10 native bat species tough out the cold by hibernating, 3 species migrate to warmer areas. Our most common migrating bat is the Eastern Red Bat.

Eastern Red Bats are also known as tree bats as they spend most of their days in forests roosting under clusters of leaves. Their reddish-brown, grizzled fur allows red bats to easily mimic hanging dead leaves. This camouflage helps them avoid predators while snoozing during the day. Eastern Red Bats have an approximate wingspan of 13 inches and can live up to 12 years in the wild.

Eastern Red Bats are widespread across much of North America, including southern Canada. They are absent only from the Rocky Mountains and southern Florida. In late Summer/early Fall, Eastern Red Bats migrate south. Their migration routes and overwintering ranges are still poorly understood. Unfortunately, Eastern Red Bats have been found deceased at several wind turbine facilities.

Eastern Red Bats are insectivorous, enjoying a diet of moths, beetles, plant-hoppers, ants, flies, mosquitoes, and more. On average, they attack insects every 30 seconds and have a 40% success rate. Bats also serve as prey to raptors and opossums.

Eastern Red Bats mate in the fall, and females store sperm until the following spring. Unlike most other Maryland bats, Eastern Red Bats can have up to 4 young (pups) at a time! Newborn bats are hairless and helpless. It takes the young 3-5 weeks until they are able to fly on their own. The young stay in the roost while the female feeds. She will return to nurse.

To attract Eastern Red Bats to your backyard, keep standing dead trees that do not pose harm to people or property. Large, living trees can also provide important roost sites for Eastern Red Bats. Nearby water sources like ponds, streams, and lakes also are great attractants for bats. Most bats



prefer to roost and nest within a quarter mile of water. Occasionally, Eastern Red Bats will use well-placed bat houses, and backyard moth gardens provide a great food resource for hungry bats.



Want to Learn More about Bats?

Check out our page on Maryland bats here:
http://dnr2.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/bats/index.aspx



Roosting eastern red bat by Chris Harshaw, Wikimedia Commons

Fall HabiChat Tips

Check out previous Fall HabiChat articles for more ideas on Fall wildlife gardening.

1. [Attracting Fall Migrants](#)
2. [Fall Hawk Watching Tips](#)
3. [Fall Tips for Wild Acres](#)
4. [Fuel Fall Migrants](#)



*White-crowned sparrows are common fall migrants.
By: Tom Koerner/USFWS*

Want more Habi-chats? Check out our archives here:
http://dnr2.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/habitat/habichat_archives.aspx

Habitat Tips: Sowing Seeds in Fall

During this time of year, many native plants are going to seed. As the seeds leave their parent plants, they eventually make their way to the ground to become “planted”. Of course, not all seeds make it and that is why some plants are such prolific producers.

As backyard wildlife gardener, you can emulate this natural sowing process by planting wildflower seeds in the fall. This method allows plants more time to establish in the soil and provides cold stratification (aka cold dormancy) needed by many native plants.



Photo by David Carr, Flickr CC

Steps for Sowing in the Fall:

- 1. Choose Your Site and Best Planting Time.** Selecting the best site depends on the requirements your plants need. Border areas with full sun usually work best for most wildflowers. It is best to wait until AFTER a killing frost hits your area and BEFORE the ground freezes. Waiting for this window allows you to select a time when the growing season is over, and you are still able to plant seeds. Don't worry- your seed won't sprout until Spring.
- 2. Clear Existing Plants.** Remove existing vegetation in your planting area. Use a shovel or a rototiller to churn up the soil a few inches under the surface. This provides an open area, free of competition, for your plants to establish. Don't use herbicides to clear plants as many will persist in the soil and may impact your future seed germination.

3. **Spread Seed Evenly.** Use a spreader or hand sow seeds across your planting site. Be sure to spread seeds across all bare areas of soil to prevent establishment by unwanted plants. The sand-split method is great if you are spreading seeds by hand. Simply add equal parts of fine sand and seed to a bucket and then mix. Split the mix into two equal amounts. Spread the first half of the mix by hand in the forward direction, and then spread the second half of the mix by hand in the reverse direction.
4. **Compress & Don't Cover.** Gently push your seeds into the soil by light tamping or by walking over it. Employ the kids to run over your seed bed! Over time, the seeds will work themselves into the proper germination position. Covering seeds with hay often introduces competing weed seeds. If planting in a highly erodable area, then cover with weed-free hay.
5. **Enjoy a Nice, Hot Beverage.** You're done!

After sowing, you may be visited by hungry birds. You can feel free to scare them away, but if you seeded properly then there should be enough for the birds and for your future garden. Any leftover seed can be stored in a cool, dry place for future use. Make sure seed storage sites don't have extreme temperature fluctuations or excess moisture which may signal your seeds to germinate.

Pro Tip: Red-breasted Grosbeaks!

Reports are coming in from several Habichat readers that Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have been seen at feeders. During certain years, known as irruptions, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks become a common sight at feeders. It's too early to tell if 2015 will be an irruption year, but there is always hope! ☺

For more information about Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, check out last year's HabiChat here: <http://dnr2.maryland.gov/wildlife/HabichatArchive/Habichat44.pdf>



Backyard Wildlife Fun for Kids: Recycling Pumpkins for Wildlife

It's pumpkin season! While pumpkin-flavored everything is on the shelves at supermarkets, many wildlife gardeners are also buying whole pumpkins to carve and decorate. Interestingly enough, pumpkins are native to North America and can be a great food source for wildlife. Here are some ideas on how you can recycle pumpkins for wildlife.

1. **Carve & Compost.** After carving up a pumpkin, compost the watery pumpkin innards. The material is mostly water and will break down quickly. Once you are done with the pumpkin, you can compost that too!
2. **Serve and/or Sow the Seeds.** If you don't eat pumpkin seeds, then serve them up for wildlife. Allow seeds to air dry then lay them outside for wildlife. Be sure not to season or salt seeds before serving.

As an alternative, you can take some of your collected seeds and sow them for next year's pumpkin patch. Seeds can be sown directly in the ground following the last frost in the Spring. If you want large pumpkins before Halloween, then start seedlings indoors before transplanting. Pumpkin flowers are pollinated by tiny, native squash bees that live in the ground. Be sure to leave at least a 20 foot area for each pumpkin and don't overtil the soil, so you don't destroy the nesting squash bee pollinators.

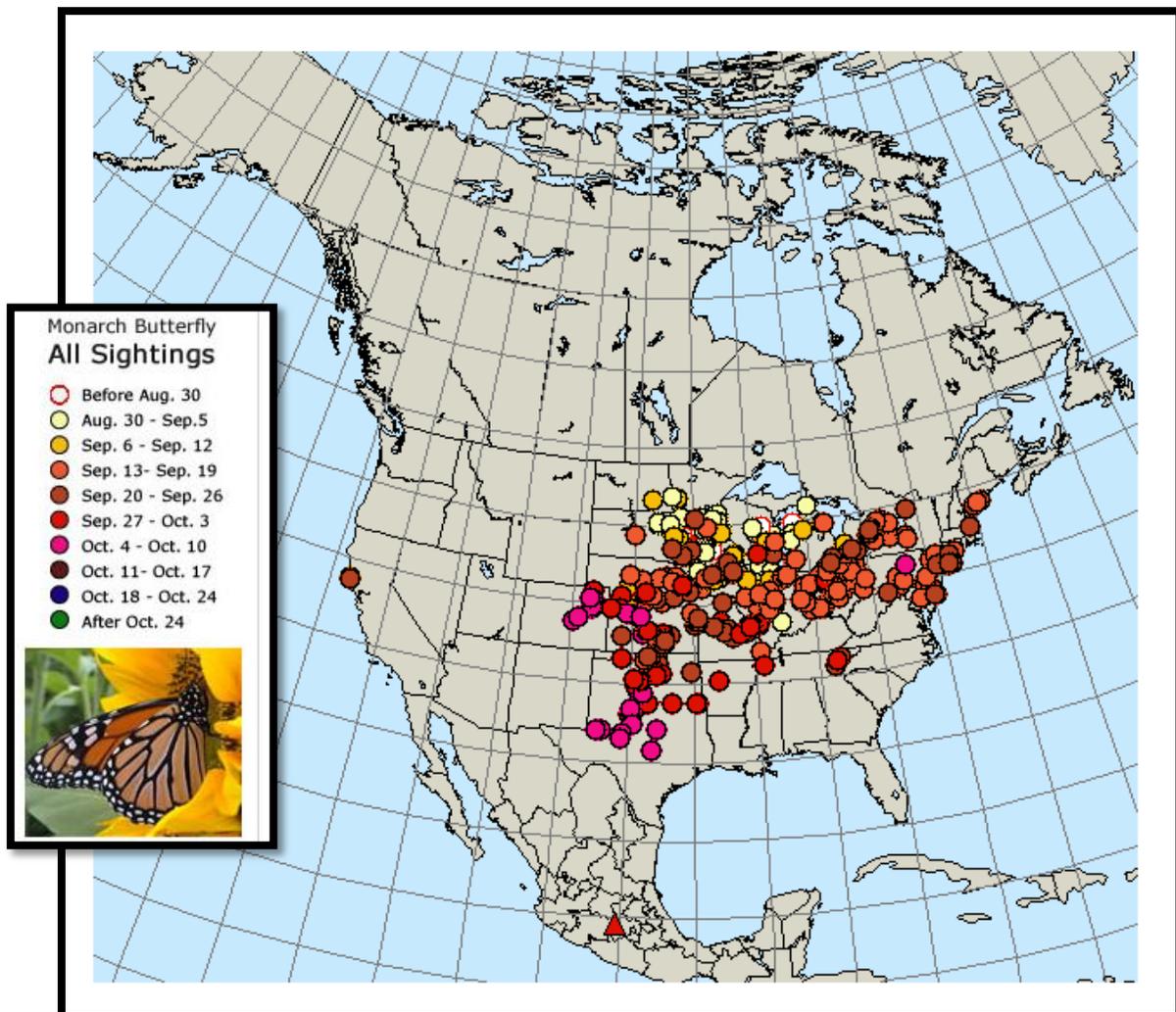
3. **Create a Snack-o-Lantern.** National Wildlife Federation has some great instructions on how to easily create a snack-o-lantern with leftover carved pumpkins, dowel rods, string, and seed. Check out [this page here](#) for more details.
4. **Serve Sections of Pumpkins.** Sometimes, squirrels won't even wait until your pumpkin is carved and/or cut up! If you have leftover pumpkin, then cut it up into pieces and lay it out for wildlife. Squirrels, chipmunks, groundhogs, and even late season butterflies will feed off of the pumpkin.



Citizen Science: Journey North: Monarch Migration



Every Fall, millions of monarchs travel south to overwinter in places like Mexico and southern California. Report your sightings of migrating and roosting monarchs with Journey North here: <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/> Below is the map from early October.



Certifiably WILD: Certify Your WILD Yard with the National Aquarium!

Is your garden wildlife and water quality-friendly? Do you practice sustainable gardening techniques? If so, your yard can be Certifiably Wild!

This program is a partnership between the National Aquarium and the National Wildlife Federation. The program encourages wildlife and water-friendly yards, and allows gardeners to certify their yard for recognition of their commitment to a better watershed.



The benefits of certification include:

- An official certificate for your wildlife habitat
- A welcome letter to a growing community of wildlife gardening enthusiasts
- A Certifiably Wild window cling to display your commitment to wildlife conservation and the environment
- A free one-year membership to NWF, which includes a subscription to National Wildlife ® magazine
- A subscription to NWF's Garden for Wildlife e-newsletter
- A subscription to the National Aquarium's monthly conservation e-newsletter
- An attractive yard sign to designate your yard as wildlife-friendly

Visit the website at www.aqua.org/garden to find valuable resources for native, sustainable, and wildlife gardening and to complete the certification form for your yard! If you have any questions about the program, please email us at garden@aqua.org.



Acknowledgements

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- Squirrel in a pumpkin by [Bob Mical, Flickr Creative Commons](#)
- All other photos by Kerry Wixted

We want to hear from you!

Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings, etc!

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