



Habitats

A Fact Sheet Series on Managing Lands for Wildlife

Planning a Backyard Wildlife Habitat

Bulletin #7133

It seems everyone has different attitudes about planning. Whether you write things down, or just think about them, planning is necessary to create a backyard habitat that will be enjoyed by wildlife and by you. Creating a good habitat takes time, experience, observation and some study. Over the years, your plantings will mature, and you will add new vegetation and features that will enhance what you have done already.

What do you want? It is very important to think about what *you* want in your yard, in terms of wildlife and other uses or values. What are your backyard habitat goals? Do you want to focus on a few species, or attract as many species as possible? What species have you already seen in your yard? What species are present in your community? Keep in mind that you will be managing the habitat, not the wildlife species themselves.

What else is important about your yard? Do you want privacy, views from your windows of gardens, flowering trees and shrubs, a windbreak for north winds, or summer shade for south-facing windows? Make a list of goals for your habitat, and put them in priority order. You will provide suitable habitat for wildlife while you create a landscape to meet your needs.

Inventory. Sketch a map of your yard, and draw in the buildings, septic tanks and fields, power lines, driveways and so on. Draw in the existing plants, trees, hedges and other plants you wish to keep. It is not necessary to remove existing plantings. You might start with what you have and add others. Include on your map features on neighboring lands, such as a pond, big white pine trees or a rock wall. Habitats do not conform to our property lines, so think like wildlife, and see the greater possibilities offered in your environs. To your map, add information on soil and light conditions, such as wet areas, dry areas, shady and sunny areas. Identify soil types, and, to find out if there are nutrient deficiencies, consider having certain areas tested through your county Extension office. Use the grid provided on page 3 to help with your sketch map.



Learn about the principles and components of a backyard habitat. Information on habitats is available at your local library or your county Extension office. Ask for copies of bulletins “Principles for Creating a Backyard Wildlife Habitat,” #7132, and “Components of a Backyard Wildlife Habitat,” #7132. Review your map to see which components of backyard habitat are present in your yard and neighborhood.

Develop a plan. Check the library and the bookstore for references that may be helpful. Visit nurseries and greenhouses to see what plants are available. Talk with people, such as your county Extension office staff, nursery owners, local garden club members and neighbors. Are you looking for shade-loving plants, plants that like wet soils? Your map information will help you decide what plants you need. Review your habitat goals. Are

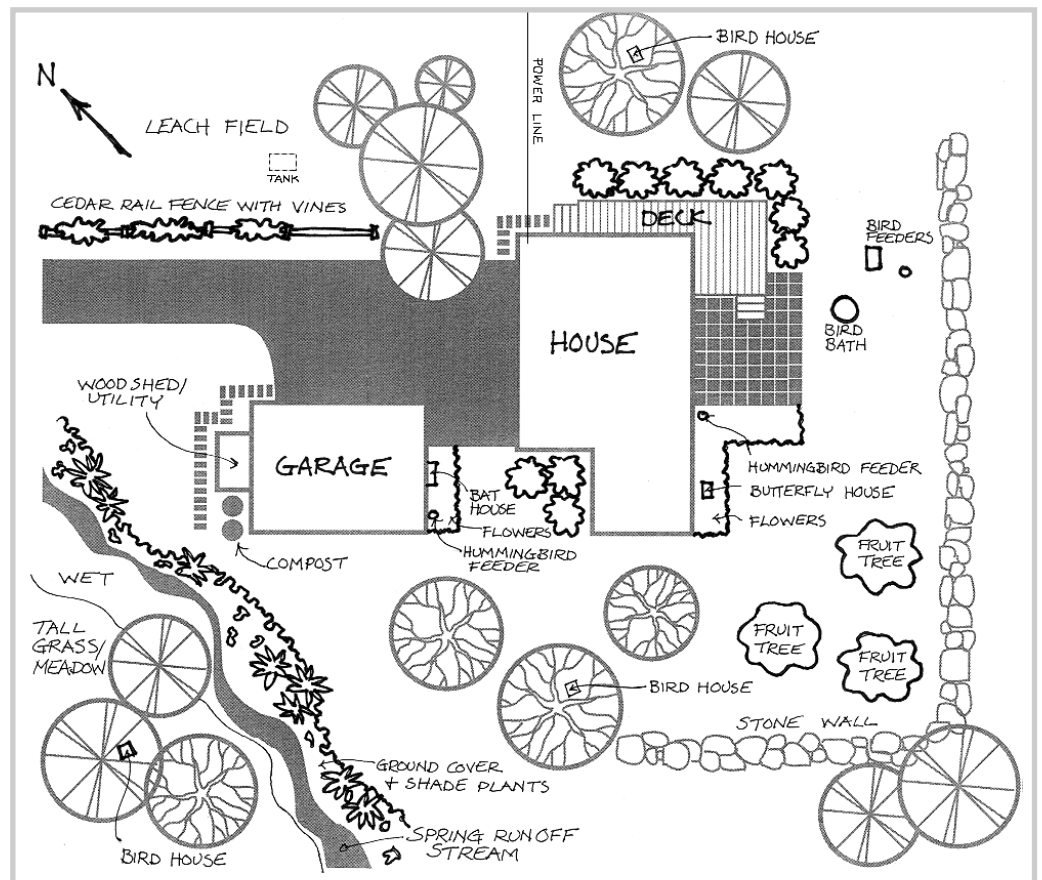
the wildlife species you want to attract feasible for your situation? With time and experience, your habitat management goals may change.

Consider how much you can take on each season, and how much you can manage over time. Your choices in plant materials may need more or less maintenance. Feeders, birdbaths and nest boxes also require upkeep.

Do it. Identify which area or areas of your yard you want to do first, and get specific about your choices of plants, shrubs and trees. In choosing and placing them, follow the principles of backyard habitat, including function, diversity, arrangement and seasonality. Each season, as you plant, add the new plantings to your map. Draw in non-living components, too, such as feeders and birdbaths. The size and situation of our yards make it unlikely that all 16 habitat components

Sketch a map like this one of your yard. Draw in buildings, septic tanks and fields, and power lines, as well as existing plants, trees and hedges you wish to keep.

Each season, add new plantings to your map. Draw in non-living components, too, such as feeders and birdbaths.



will be possible. (See UMCE bulletin #7137, "Components of a Backyard Habitat" for a list of the 16 components.) Some may be available elsewhere in your neighborhood. Make an effort to include as many as you can. If you have a small yard, it may be most beneficial for wildlife to provide plants that offer winter foods and cover. Many plants serve several functions. For example, some perennial flowers are attractive to nectar-feeders such as butterflies, moths, bees or hummingbirds and may also have seeds for the birds in fall and winter if you leave them standing at the end of the summer.



Review your goals and your plan each year. Keep a record book of what you have planted and of the wildlife you observe. Share your enthusiasm, experiences and learnings with others.

Change plans as needed. Habitat management is part science and part art. Reflect on what you do each year, what you observe about how different wildlife species use your yard, how the plantings are doing, what you like or don't like about them. Consider what you will do next year, thinking again about the principles and components of a backyard habitat. Learning about wildlife and the plant materials will help you to make good choices. When a choice turns out to be not what you had in mind, learn from it and make better future choices. You might take photographs, keep a record book of the common and botanical names of what you have planted, and of wildlife you observe. Share your enthusiasm, experiences and learnings with others. Several neighbors together can create an even more attractive habitat and draw an even greater diversity of wildlife.

For more information, contact your county Extension Office of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

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Sources:

- "Landscaping for Wildlife," by Carrol L. Henderson, Minnesota Department. of Natural Resources, 1987.
- "Enhancing Your Backyard Habitat for Wildlife," by Peter M. Picone, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 1995.

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