National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Habitat Program

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Do you want to make your property or your school a more attractive, safer wildlife habitat, while also taking better care of the environment? If so, why not take part in the Backyard Wildlife Habitat Certification program through the National Wildlife Federation (NWF)?

The NWF has set guidelines for the certification program, which are aimed to help you transform your outdoor spaces away from lawn-dominated areas that contain invasive exotic plants and chemical pesticides/fertilizers. Instead, they help you move toward a native plant-based, chemical free, wildlife-friendly habitat. As a result, your yard, school, or even your balcony (if you're a city apartment dweller) can receive national certification as a wildlife habitat, which gives you a sense of accomplishment, helps take care of wildlife in your area, and improves your local environment.

Here's how you can do it. The Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program's certification requirements are fairly straightforward. These are the steps:

- Provide basic habitat elements for wildlife. Your property must include: 1) food, 2) water, 3) cover, and 4) places to raise young for local wildlife.
- Meet sustainable landscaping practices. This involves practices such as water conservation, growth of native vegetation, building healthy soil through composting and other methods, and eliminating chemical use on your property.
- Submit an application for certification to the National Wildlife Federation. You can find the application online at www.nwf.org.
- Upon review, if your application meets the criteria, you will be notified of certification and will be mailed a certificate and sign to place in your yard. All property sizes are acceptable - from large tracts of land to small city balconies.

Basic Habitat Elements - Here's How

FOOD - It's easy and fun to provide for the habitat needs of wildlife. You can provide food by planting native shrubs and trees that bear fruits, nuts, seeds, or berries. You can place birdfeeders and ground feeders and fill them with natural seed and food blends. Plant nectar-producing native wildflowers. Insects are important, too. Avoid using chemical pesticides to rid insects...many wildlife species, especially birds, feed on them.

WATER - Provide a water source for drinking and bathing. Some of you have natural sources, like lakes, streams and ponds on your property, but those that do not can create them. Use clean birdbaths and change the water daily. Or, install a small pond or stream with some of the great do-it-yourself pond products available today.

COVER - Meet the cover/shelter needs of wildlife by taking a look at your property. Evergreen trees, native vines, shrubbery, brush piles, rock piles, meadow grass, and ponds all provide excellent cover for wildlife. During inclement weather, birds may use a man-made roost box to escape cold winds.

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PLACES TO RAISE YOUNG - All species reproduce, and it's important to include areas of your property where they can safely raise their young. Birds need tree cavities or man-made nestboxes. Amphibians need ponds or swamps. Some animals need burrows or dens, and some need tall grasses.

Sustainable Landscaping - Here's How

Sustainable landscaping involves many actions, but primarily it is defined as actions that provide the best food and cover sources for wildlife while using the least amount of fertilizer, water and pest control. The National Wildlife Federation suggests the following:

- Plant native plants suitable for your region. Non-native species can take over and choke out native species, to the detriment of wildlife.
- Use captured rainwater for plants instead of groundwater. If you must use groundwater, use a drip soaker hose instead of sprinklers to cut down on water usage.
- Use mulch to conserve soil moisture.
- Eliminate all chemical fertilizers in your yard because they can poison certain wildlife species. Instead, use natural alternatives like composting and manure.
- Control pests with natural pest control products and by encouraging predator species.
- Reduce lawn areas - lawn care uses approximately 50-70% of our water. Instead, allow native species to grow back - you'll save mowing time and cut down on gas mower pollution, too.

Backyard Wildlife Certification is something you can take pride in and something that improves your neighborhood. For full details on what you can do to get your property certified, visit www.nwf.org. With Backyard Certification, you can make a difference in the environment, and to wildlife - for years to come.

Recommended Products

Recycled Platform Feeders

Premium Waste-Free Total Cuisine

Nesting Huts Birdhouses

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