

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY URBAN BACKYARDS

Because so much of America's wild lands have been lost there is a crisis of habitat for the wildlife that used to live in the areas which are now urbanized. Where are they to go and what are they to eat and drink?

Even if our yards are small we can each help to alleviate this problem by making them wildlife friendly. For example, we can furnish a part of our yards with saucers of drinking water during the dry summer months. The insects, birds and small mammals will use this as a precious life-saving resource. Every day in summer I fill the four birdbaths in our front and back yards with fresh water which the birds visit in droves. I have seen eight birds at a time drinking and bathing in a single 18 inch planter!

So many backyards in our neighborhood are covered with grass and non-native plants which are unfriendly to wildlife. Animals can only utilize certain plants as food and some are unusable or even poisonous. Grass is an environmental disaster. It requires a prodigious amount of water which in drought regions is irreplaceable. Pesticides are generally used it which poison the ecosystem and drain off into our rivers and oceans. People then mow it and put the clippings in plastic bags which are hauled away (using fossil fuels) to the landfill. What a tragedy!

The best alternative is mulching. Mulch is an easy way to create a healthy ecosystem and you don't ever have to mow. Tip: if you decide to mulch don't begin by laying plastic sheets beneath your mulching material. Plastic biodegrades at a glacial rate and will still be here in the year 2525. Plus, these sheets don't allow anything to grow or breathe underneath and kill off all the little insects that are essential to a thriving ecosystem. Put flat sheets of cardboard beneath the mulch. These will quickly biodegrade, providing nourishment for the plants and leading to a living ecosystem.

I can attest to this from my own experience. Janet and I live in Denver and we have created a garden that is friendly to wildlife. The mulch in our yard provides a place where insects live, providing food for larger animals. We have also planted natives such as mahonia and manzanita that provide forage for small wildlife.

We have learned so much from this process and we have the joy of watching animals visit our yard. We have chosen to do this rather than have companion animals. We love cats and dogs but it is the small wild creatures, lacking their former habitat, who are most in need of protection.

After seeing the most basic of environmental protections under fire it is easy to become cynical and say "what's the use?" But if we each create a little bit of habitat for birds and other creatures we will make it possible for wildlife to live side by side with us in urban and suburban areas. Even if you have an apartment balcony, you can leave a dish of fresh water outside and plant in a way that is ecologically harmonious. Connect with local environmental groups or nurseries and find out what plants are most beneficial for all forms of wildlife in your region.

Although we love dogs and cats, one essential of a wildlife garden is to provide safety from predators. Dogs and cats must be kept away from this habitat or the wildlife will not come. We have planted a thicket composed of twigs and branches, trimmed from trees and bushes, and we

weave them into a fence that is now five feet high. Small birds like to take shelter there. Almost all of the materials I have mentioned cost zero money and make use of whatever is at hand in the backyard or the alleys. We get cuttings of native plants from our friends and give cuttings to anyone who wants them. Tree services are often glad to deliver free mulch. It's easy. It just takes an open heart, a willing hand, and the rewards are beyond description.

Resources about ecofriendly urban gardens:

[My Suburban Front Yard Wildlife Garden \(You Tube Video\)](#)

[Garden Designs for Wildlife Gardens](#)

nativeplantwildlifegarden.com/how-to-design-your-native...

[Call of the Wild: Design Your Own Wildlife Garden](#)

<http://www.hgtvgardens.com/garden-types/call-of-the-wild-design-your-own-wildlife-garden>