



Habitat at Home

Supporting wildlife habitat where you live, work, and play



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

What is wildlife habitat?

Wildlife habitat provides four essential elements for local wildlife to thrive:

- Food
- Shelter
- Water
- Space

Who can create wildlife habitat?

Anyone can provide elements of food, water, shelter, and space for wildlife by choosing what plants they grow. Native plants have evolved with wildlife and thus provide all these elements for species in our area. For instance, adding structure to your garden with diverse plants or physical features like logs can create places where water can collect temporarily.

Providing habitat for wildlife no matter the size of your space can make a huge difference. Renters and those with small spaces, residential homes with yards or acreage, and those with shared spaces like schools, community centers, and businesses all have ways to help provide essential habitat for wildlife.

Why is creating wildlife habitat on private lands important?

As human development continues, private property becomes especially important as it can connect or fragment wildlife habitat. By creating habitat at home for wildlife, you are helping to offset the acres of habitat that are lost to housing and urban development each year. A simple container garden can help decrease habitat fragmentation for small species like insects and terrestrial mollusks, especially in highly urbanized areas.

Wildlife habitat benefits more than wildlife, it can benefit you, too. Native plants are adapted to the natural rainfall in your area, and thus require less maintenance. Native plants also help reduce stormwater runoff pollution and can decrease the heat island effect in your community.

Why get your habitat certified?

After creating your “Habitat at Home,” apply for a certification sign from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) so you can help raise awareness. Raising awareness helps educate others and encourages neighbors to join us in creating wildlife habitat on private lands. Apply for a certification on our website.

Scan the QR code or enter the link in your web browser to learn more about The Habitat at Home Program: wdfw.wa.gov/habitat-at-home





CREATING HABITAT AT HOME

GETTING STARTED with your home habitat means understanding your space and learning about your local species. This packet helps you understand the basics for getting your home habitat going. Creating wildlife habitat will look different in every space. To be certified you do not need to provide everything on the list, but provide elements of wildlife habitat and work to implement sustainable practices.



SMALL SPACES

Provide at least two habitat elements including some plants for shelter and natural food. Avoid harmful chemicals and protect the space from domestic animals.



RESIDENTIAL SPACES

Provide at least three elements of habitat including space and shelter for wildlife through plants or trees.



SHARED SPACES

Provide at least two habitat elements including plants for shelter and natural food. Avoid harmful chemicals and protect local water sources.



NATIVE PLANTS

Choosing native plants is a great starting place because they are well adapted to our environment, resistant to local pests, and support the most species diversity in our area. Plants are the basis of the local food chain, and starting with native plants give your wildlife habitat the best chance of success.

STARTER PLANT LIST

Ground cover: Bunchberry (*Cornus unalashkenis*), Kinnikinnik (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Wild strawberry (*Fragaria*), Rubus (*Rubus calycinoides*)

Shrubs: Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), Pacific Ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*), Red Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)

Trees: Pacific Crabapple (*Malus fusca*), Western Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*), Indian Plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*), Vine Maple (*Acer circinatum*), Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*)





THE REAL DIRT ABOUT SOIL

THE SUCCESS OF YOUR GARDEN depends on having healthy garden soil. Think of soil as a living community rather than an inert pile of dirt. Plants need the chemicals and minerals in the soil but those elements are not in a form that plants can utilize. This is where soil organisms come in. Beneficial bacteria, fungi, nematodes and other organisms in the soil convert nutrients into a form plants can use. Here are some basics on how to take care of the living community that is your soil.



ORGANIC MATERIAL

Since plants are full of the good stuff they take up from the soil, composted plants are a great thing to add back to the soil. Add compost each season to replenish what the living plants have removed.

MULCH

Covering bare soil helps regulate the temperature and reduce moisture loss. Wood chips do a great job and will eventually break down to help the soil. When this happens, add more mulch.

COMPACTION AND DISTURBANCE

Gardens, by their nature, get disturbed. Planting seeds, weeding, and transplanting all disturb the soil to some extent. However, turning the soil over disturbs the balance of moisture and air and changes the structure of the soil. This takes time to rebalance. Minimizing the disturbance helps quicken the healing. Disturb only as much as you need to.



Let the microscopic community in your garden soil do what it does best and you will be rewarded with beautiful, healthy plants.

CHEMICALS

Your first line of defense against insect and fungal pests is strong, healthy plants. Using pesticides, even pesticides developed to address specific targets, will disrupt the balance of organisms in the soil. When the need to deal with pests arises always choose the safest and mildest option. Even synthetic fertilizers can be disruptive. An organic fertilizer is a milder and just as effective option.

MOISTURE

Even, adequate moisture in the soil gets the best results. Mulching and minimizing soil disturbance help regulate the soil moisture. Avoid working saturated soils as it destroys the needed air passages. Water as needed but do not over water.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO





FINDING THE RIGHT PLANT FOR THE RIGHT PLACE

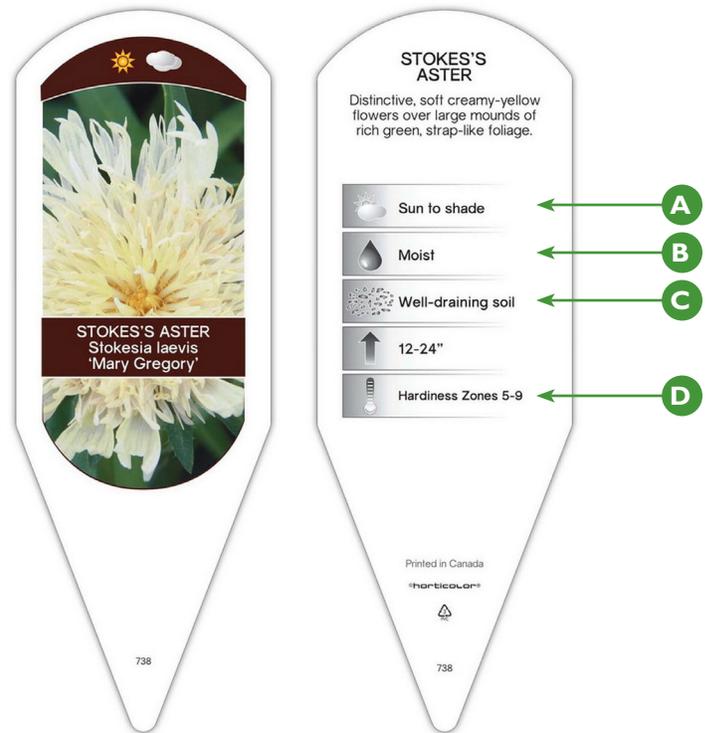
GARDENING becomes much easier when you choose the right plant for the right spot.

If you choose plants that are best suited to the location they'll be planted in, they should grow to be healthy with minimal work. The right plant in the right spot should establish quickly with a healthy root system. These healthy plants are better suited to withstand any environmental issues. For example – healthy plants that are planted in ideal locations are less likely to become diseased, and less likely to be adversely impacted by insect damage. While insects are still going to munch on your plants, the healthy plant will just shrug it off and keep on growing. It's the unhealthy plants that have less energy to respond to random insect dining and are more adversely impacted.

So how do you go about finding the right plant for the right spot? Here are a couple things to consider:

- **Evaluate your general environment.** For example – are your summers long, hot and humid, or milder with cool nights even when the days are hot?
- **Think about what plants grow naturally where you live.** Native plants will always perform best, however work with your local nursery to choose non-native plants that are not invasive and that respond well to your specific conditions.
- **Consider your planting spots and their unique conditions.** Is one garden space much drier while another bed is cooler and wetter? Defining your planting areas will help you identify plants that will respond best to each spot in your garden.
- **Identify the character of each bed:**

- **A How much sun does it receive?** Choosing plants for the correct amount of sun is step one in keeping them healthy and happy. This is the most basic thing you can do to help your plants thrive and is often included on plant tags.
 - 6 or more hours of sun is considered full sun
 - 4 to 6 hours of sun is considered part sun/part shade
 - Less than 4 hours of sun is considered shade



B Is your bed close to a water source?

- Plants that need little water can be beyond the reach of the hose
- Plants that need more water should be within easy reach of your watering source

C Is the soil wet, dry or normal? Plant tags should include information on water requirements, but always ask your local nursery if you have questions.

- Plants that need good drainage won't thrive in moist conditions
- Plants that need moisture won't thrive in dry beds
- Consider nearby shrubs and trees with extensive root systems – they leave less water for annuals and perennials.

- **Are you planting in a high traffic area or out of the way? Maintenance matters!**

- If you plant high maintenance plants in an area you frequent, you're more likely to maintain them deadheading, pruning, fertilizing and pest treatments. High maintenance plants should be placed in locations you see often.
- Plants that can take being ignored are well suited to corners of the garden. These are considered your "low maintenance" plants.

- **What structures are near the beds that might affect them?**

- Is your bed against a wall that receives sun all day? If so, it will be hotter than a similar full sun bed not against a wall
- Walls can also serve as windbreaks, making them a nice location for delicate plants

D **What is your USDA hardiness zone?** Knowing your zone will help you identify plants that will be winter hardy, and that fit your specific planting space. You can find the USDA hardiness zone here:

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb>

The hardiness is most important when choosing a perennial, shrub or tree as they're most likely to make it through the winter.

- **Other things to consider.**

- If planting where kids play, choose plants that can take some abuse.
- If planting under a window or in a narrow space, choose plants that don't naturally spread. Choosing a plant that fits the spot makes maintenance much easier.

When all else fails, and you're feeling overwhelmed – try native plants! Each area has a wealth of native plants to choose from. They are less likely to have pest and disease issues, and should do well in your specific conditions.

Choosing the right plant for the right spot really is as simple as choosing a plant well-suited to the location. Putting in some thought and time before choosing and planting can save time and help your garden be its best. And remember, if a plant doesn't thrive where you've planted it – you haven't failed, consider it a learning experience. You learn gardening by doing, and doing always provides learning opportunities.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO





HOW TO MAKE A SIMPLE SEED BALL

SEED BALLS, OR BOMBS, are a simple and easy planting method. It's said that Japanese farmer, Masanobu Fukuoka, created seed balls which became a popular method for growing plants in areas that were difficult to farm. Today, "guerrilla" gardeners use seed balls to establish seeds in neglected areas where they'd like to see plants grow.

You don't need to spread them around to areas that are difficult to farm, feel free to make them and have your kids plant them in pots or open spaces in your yard and watch what comes up.



HOW SEED BALLS WORK:

Compost and clay protects the seeds from drying out, washing away or being eaten by birds. As the weather breaks down the seed ball, the compost and clay will help the seed to root and grow.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Large bowl
- Compost (you can pick up a bag of compost from your local nursery or garden store)
- Powdered clay (available from art stores and needed to hold the balls together and keep them moist)
- Water
- Seeds. Choose seeds that are native to the area you live, a wildflower mix will be most successful as there are plants that thrive under different conditions, or harvest seeds from the plants growing around you.
- Wax paper or other non-stick paper to dry the seed balls on.
- Box to store seed balls

RECIPE:

The best ratio is **four (4) parts compost to one (1) part powdered clay by weight**. You'll need just enough water for the compost to be slightly moist, but not wet.

Directions for making the seed balls:

- Measure **four (4) parts compost to one (1) part powdered clay** into a bowl
- Mix your compost and clay together, hands work best for this job!
- Add your seeds. The compost/clay mixture should surround the seeds, so don't put in too many.
- Add water very slowly and gradually. Use only enough to make your mixture the consistency of clay. Don't let it get too wet.
- Roll small amounts of the mixture into marble-sized balls.
- Place them in your box, on a piece of wax or non-stick paper to dry for 24 to 48 hours.

Now that you've got seed balls – here's when to plant them, and where!

- Seed balls can be planted in either spring or fall.
- Find a bare area where nothing is growing, or a pot that you want to put the seed ball in.
- If planting somewhere other than your own yard, be sure to have the owner's permission.
- Toss the seed balls in the area, or if putting in a pot outdoors, set on top of the soil.
- After each rain you should see the seed balls start breaking down.
- Once the balls start disappearing, check for seedlings.

Planting seed bombs is a long-term project. You may see seedlings in the fall or next spring, and flowers in the spring or summer. Once your wildflowers bloom, sit back and watch the pollinators visit.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

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garden+home
molbaks.com





CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF YOUR BACKYARD POLLINATORS

OVER THE YEARS, we've become more aware of the importance of pollinators in our environment, whether they're bees, flies, wasps, some moths, butterflies or hummingbirds. Pollinators keep plants robust and productive, and are essential parts of a healthy ecosystem. Without pollinators, agricultural food sources are threatened.



You can help keep our pollinators, and the ecosystems that depend on them, healthy by creating welcome spaces for them in your yards, on your decks, or in your community.

1. PLANT DIVERSE FLOWERING PLANTS.

The more diverse the landscaping, the more pollinators you'll have visiting. Having enough variety of plants so that something is in bloom year-round is the easiest way to ensure on-going pollination. Visit your local nursery once a month throughout the year to see what's blooming. Choose a plant you like and find a suitable place for it in your space.



2. PLANT A BEE LAWN.

Instead of a grass lawn, consider a "bee lawn." Convert a traditional grass lawn into a meadow of flowering ground covers like clover or creeping thyme. This cuts down on mowing time and emissions, and provides food for hungry pollinators.



3. OPEN YOUR OWN INSECT HOTEL.

It's easy to become a landlord for a host of bugs and Mason bees. You can purchase a "hotel" at your local garden center, or create your own. Place your hotel facing east for early morning sun. Building and observing an insect hotel is a great activity for kids; what can you learn from a pollinator?

<https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/flowers-and-plants/how-to-build-a-bug-hotel>



4. ADD A MASON BEE HOUSE.

Mason bees are native, solitary pollinators and rarely sting. You can purchase mason bee houses from your local garden center to get them established in your yard, or build your own.

<http://content.yardmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Mason-Bee-Care-1.pdf>



5. PROVIDE WATER FOR POLLINATORS.

All that pollinating can make a bee thirsty. Place a small dish with marbles or rocks and water in your yard or on your patio. This gives bees a safe place to land and drink water without drowning. Bird baths are great for birds, but a little too deep for our bees. Do not add sugar, honey or any other flavoring to the water to avoid growing bacteria and mold. Bees will find your dish and return time and time again if you keep it filled with fresh clean water.

6.



6. MUD-PUDDLING FOR BUTTERFLIES.

While many butterflies feed on nectar from flowers, they also get essential minerals and salts from mud and manure. When butterflies congregate in mud puddles it's called "mud-puddling". You can create a mud puddle in your garden to help butterflies. Choose a sunny spot in your garden near flowering plants. Place a glazed ceramic saucer in that site, and fill it to within a half inch of the rim with a 1:1 mix of garden soil and composted steer manure (available at nurseries and garden centers). Add water to the mixture to keep it moist all summer – then sit back and watch for butterflies. Come winter, dump the mixture, clean the saucer and store it inside for next year. Refill it again in late spring.

7.



7. ATTRACTING AND CARING FOR HUMMINGBIRDS.

There are many ways to care for our local hummingbirds. First, fill your yard with native flowering plants, trees and vines. Plants with red and orange tubular flowers are favorites of hummingbirds, so feel free to group them together. Provide sticks and branches as perching places. Avoid pesticides. Hummingbirds love to bathe, and misting devices are particularly attractive to them. Backyard hummingbird feeders are a great way of augmenting food, but you must be mindful of the following to keep your hummingbirds safe:

- Hang feeders far enough apart that hummingbirds don't see each other. This prevents one bird from dominating the rest.
- Fill feeders with sugar water only – made by combining **four (4) parts hot water to one (1) part white sugar**, boiled for one to two minutes. Do not use honey, artificial sweeteners or red dye. They can make hummingbirds sick!
- Hang your feeders in the shade to prevent the sugar solution from fermenting.
- Change the sugar water regularly and before it gets cloudy, or twice a week in warm weather.
- Clean feeders with a **one (1) part white vinegar to four (4) parts water** solution once a week. If the inside of your feeder is dirty, add a few grains of dry rice to the vinegar solution and shake vigorously. Rice acts as a natural abrasive.
- Rinse the feeder well with warm water three times before refilling with sugar water solution.
- Visit eBird (<https://ebird.org/explore>) to find out when the first hummingbird sightings occur each spring in your area, then hang your feeders up a couple weeks before that. In the fall, take your feeders down two weeks after you see the last bird using it.

Photo Credits (in order of appearance): WPZ; Unknown; Courtesy of Anne Heathen, Flickr; WPZ; Courtesy of Siamese Puppy, Flickr; Courtesy of Kahunapule Michael Johnson, Flickr; WPZ

SPECIAL THANKS TO



Habitat at Home: Yard Sign Application

To receive this sign, you must provide information to demonstrate that your property provides the elements of a full habitat.

Questions? Contact the Habitat at Home coordinator: HabitatAtHome@dfw.wa.gov or 425-375-3728

Contact

First name _____ Last name _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Age _____

Location

My habitat is at a(n):

Home (small space, yard, or acreage)

School

Name of school _____

Organization/business

Name of organization/business _____

Habitat address

Street address line 1 _____

Street address line 2 _____

City _____ State/province _____ County _____

Zip code _____ Phone number _____

Mailing address

Street address line 1 _____

Street address line 2 _____

City _____ State/province _____ County _____

Zip code _____ Phone number _____

Habitat

Please tell us how you provide the following resources.

1. **Food** (select at least 2)

seeds nuts berries fruits suet nectar foliage/twigs sap pollen other _____

Feeders

seeds nuts fruits suet hummingbird feeder other _____

2. **Water** (select at least 1)

birdbath pond/lake stream wetland fountain other _____

3. **Cover** (select at least 2)

bat house birdhouse wooded area dense shrubs evergreens log pile meadow

rock pile ground cover snags brush pile other _____

4. **Places to raise young** (select at least 2)

trees with cavities snags dense shrubs plants for caterpillars to eat

wetland birdhouses meadow bat house wooded area other _____

5. **Resources conservation**

create a raingarden capturing roof rainwater planting native plants

reducing/eliminating lawn areas mulching/composting

reducing/eliminating pesticides and chemical fertilizer use keeping cats indoors other _____

Plants Please list all major **native** and **non-native** trees, shrubs, grasses, perennials, annuals, etc. that grow in your habitat. Also indicate the approximate **quantity** of each.

Photos

Share your photos with us! We want to see your habitat.

Use **#habitatathome** on social media or **email/mail us your photos** along with your application.

Email or mail your application to:

HabitatAtHome@dfw.wa.gov

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Habitat at Home

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Olympia, WA 98504-3141

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