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WINGED WONDERLAND

Turn your backyard or patio into a Certified Wildlife Habitat

Our wildlife habitats are diminishing. Maybe you already volunteer for the Sierra Club or make charitable donations to help preserve the wetlands. Want to have an even bigger impact? Start in your own backyard.

"The best way to help wildlife is to restore the natural environment," says David Mizejewski, a naturalist with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF).

The NWF developed a program that allows people to turn their outdoor spaces into Certified Wildlife Habitats to keep our natural world thriving. Follow these simple steps to turn your backyard or patio into a winged wonderland. — **JODI HELMER**

GO NATIVE

Native plants are the best choice for creating a thriving wildlife habitat. Native species such as magnolia and dogwoods offer food and shelter for birds, butterflies and bees.

Mizejewski notes that some birds won't eat berries from exotic plants and butterflies prefer to lay their eggs on native host plants.

SINGING FOR SUPPER

Native trees and shrubs are the best sources of food, providing pollen, nectar, fruit and seeds for wildlife. Even in a small space, potted plants can provide food for wildlife.

To attract a variety of birds, fill birdfeeders with various seeds. Be sure to hang feeders up high to keep them out of reach of predators such as cats and raccoons.

WATER FOR WILDLIFE

A clean source of drinking water is essential to support wildlife, but the H₂O in a wildlife habitat is for more than sipping. Birds use shallow water for bathing while butterflies absorb nutrients from the soil and water combination found in puddles. Don't have a pond or wetland in your backyard? Fountains and birdbaths also qualify as acceptable water sources, Mizejewski says.

HOME SWEET HOME

Animals need shelter to hide from predators and raise their young. Mature trees or dense brush are often adequate. On patios or other small spaces, birdhouses and other nesting boxes are also suitable for certification.



NOTABLE NATIVES

FOUR PLANTS FOR SOUTHEAST GARDENS:

- 1. BLACK TUPELO** *nyssa sylvatica* Bears fruit and honey, making it a wildlife favorite.
- 2. TRUMPET HONEYSUCKLE** *onicera sempervirens* Hummingbirds love the nectar.
- 3. SWAMP MILKWEED** *asclepias incarnate* Sweet milk attracts a variety of wildlife, including birds.
- 4. AMERICAN ELDERBERRY** *sambucus nigra ssp. canadensis* Flowers provide pollen and berries attract birds.

STEER CLEAR OF CHEMICALS

The NWF prefers its Certified Wildlife Habitats to be free of pesticides and weed killers because of their negative impact on the environment.

READY, SET, CERTIFY

Creating a wildlife habitat comes with rewards. Since launching the Certified Wildlife Habitat program in 1973, the NWF has certified more than 150,000 habitats. Getting certified is one way of making a commitment to the creation and preservation of wildlife habitats. For more information on Certified Wildlife Habitats, go to nwf.org/gardens.