



Planting for

There are many different species of wildlife. Each of us can assemble a list of desirable and undesirable species. The interesting thing is that the list for one person will be different than for another person. Sometimes, they may be almost opposite. It's not unheard of that homeowners have been simply thrilled to have a mother skunk raise a bunch of babies in the corner of their tool shed. Others adore hordes of birds around, while others bemoan having to wash icky stuff from their car. It is up to you to develop the objectives for wildlife for your backyard.

There are many different aspects to developing a backyard habitat for wildlife. This article discusses just one of those aspects.

Eight plant components to wildlife needs

In the spirit of managing the food component of the landscape, it is important to think about the different classes of plants and what they offer wildlife. Here are eight important plant categorizations you can selectively employ to manage backyard wildlife:

- Evergreens
- Grasses and legumes
- Plants for butterflies, bees, and moths
- Plants for hummingbirds, and some other birds
- Summer fruit, berry, and cover plants
- Fall fruits, grains, and cover plants
- Winter fruits, seeds, and cover plants
- Nut and acorn plants

Evergreens

Evergreens are the first we will talk about because they seem to become centerpieces of landscape designs, and they often provide the necessary cover for wildlife during the critical nesting and winter periods. In addition, they offer great cover from storms and produce a food source for some wildlife species. There are many different kinds of evergreens; however, if you are looking for trees to furnish cover and secure nest sites for small birds, or a near-to-the-ground cover for ground dwellers, spruces and junipers are the ticket because they typically have a dense growth form. Pines normally are more open and are great perch sites, making up for their shortfall in dense cover.

Grasses and legumes

Grasses and legumes are ground covers and, when left to grow, provide wonderful habitat for ground dwellers. In the spring, they provide high-quality food for herbivores and, later in the fall and winter, their seeds can be an important food source, too.



Backyard Wildlife

Plants for butterflies, bees, and moths

I may be somewhat of a snob who tends to focus on furry, jumping, and running creatures. I admit to being somewhat surprised at the level of interest in propagating landscapes suitable for insects.

These cold-blooded creatures are going to be with us only during warm periods of the year. Since insects go through several life stages on their way to adulthood, we need to be mindful of the requirements of these stages at the proper period of the year. Butterflies and moths come from caterpillars. When they are in that larval stage, they feed on plant foliage. Sometimes they are very specific as to the plant species they will use. When they become adults, their food requirement is generally different. In order to propagate and retain insects, you'll need to be mindful of the dual food requirements — and to provide sheltered locations for them.

Plants for hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are also sort of a special creature and, if you are to attract and hold them, they'll need to find certain plant features in their habitat. Since they feed on nectar, they prefer tubular flowers which are red. It is important to plan your plants to provide food resources over a period of time.

Summer fruit, berry, and cover plants

When we get back to developing a great habitat for the most diverse array of wildlife, we will segregate our comments by the seasons of the year. Even though summer seems to be a time



of plenty, it is important to include summertime food sources. In addition to providing cover for critical nesting periods, birds require the nutrition necessary for rearing young.

Remember the concept of staggering the ripening of fruiting species of plants which might be key to maintaining ideal habitat for a significant length of time.

Fall fruits, grains, and cover plants

In the fall, wildlife parents aren't so concerned about providing for their young, but the days are cooling, and wildlife which will stay with you into the winter need to store energy for that long winter. Wildlife preparing to migrate to new environments for the winter will need to develop energy stores to support that trip.

An emerging key characteristic to selecting fall energy food sources is the phenomena of *durability*



of the food source. It needs to remain available after the end of the growing season for the animals.

Also, do not forget that, because of the decrease in cover with the onset of leaf fall, cover components emerge as important habitat components.

Winter fruits, seeds, and cover plants

In the winter, the *durability* needed in fall food sources is best described as being *persistent* food sources. Foliage is old, dry, leached, and generally lacks nutrition. Persistent fruits or seeds become an important food source.

Remember the concept of accessibility. Plants which seem to be on the way to producing wonderful food sources in the growing season may be under snow and unavailable in these latitudes!

We aren't good judges of wildlife food palatability. But one thing which often happens with many fruits and plant parts is that they may improve in palatability when the plant goes into dormancy or the fruit ripens.

Nut and acorn plants

Most of Wyoming isn't great for producing trees that bear nuts and acorns; however, it is important to remember that these can be very important food sources because of their durability, and these trees often provide cavities for nesting.

Diversity, diversity, diversity. This is the key to maintaining a wildlife habitat that is attractive to wildlife. You need to introduce diversity in structure, food, and cover. A diverse habitat is not orderly and surely will not fit the suburban paradigm of well-manicured lawns, hedged shrubs, and mulched flowerbeds. If you are intent on creating maximum diversity, your yard might be a mess. Your neighbors may not understand. Be proactive in your solution by erecting a sign, "THIS AREA MANAGED FOR WILDLIFE DIVERSITY!"

And finally, this nugget of wisdom. The best time to have planted a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now! So go forth and manage your backyard habitat!

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