

# How To Attract Wildlife To Your Property



*There seems to be among many of us a  
psychic need to connect with nature.  
Nature is humanity's one universal  
common bond.  
It helps ensure our sanity.*

*– Scott Shalaway*

Wildlife conservationists have known for years that wildlife populations are dependent on four major factors – food, cover, water, and space.

If you have an acreage, a farm, a yard, or an apartment balcony, you can usually provide at least two of these elements on your property – food and water. It then becomes important that wildlife has access to cover and space in nearby areas in order to survive.

One of the secrets in creating a successful habitat is to provide a variation within each of the four areas. Different wildlife species need different combinations of elements. **Having a variety in your habitat means the difference between seeing 200 or just 10 different species.** Let's examine each of the habitat elements.

## **Food**

Food is one of the primary necessities of wildlife. Every species has its own food needs. Often, this changes as the species ages.

Food includes the nutritional part of the diet, as well as supplements such as salt. Also, many birds require grit or gravel for grinding up food in their gizzards.

Some wildlife species eat a variety of foods and others eat only a few different kinds. These include fruit and berries, grain

and seeds, nectar, nuts (mast), browse plants such as twigs and buds plus forage and aquatic plants.

Fruits and berries are rich in vitamins and carbohydrates and are usually available in the summer and fall. These include elderberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, cherries, grapes, mulberries, and apples.

Some varieties, such as mountain ash and holly, have berries that stay on the bush or tree and are available to wildlife in the winter.

One of the most popular berries for birds is elderberries. Fifty-one different bird species eat them. Other favorites are sunflowers, preferred by 46 species, and flowering dogwood, favored by 45 bird species.

Fruits are also eaten by many different kinds of mammals, including squirrel, fox, deer, bear, skunk, and opossum.

Nuts are really fruits with a dry, hard exterior shell and contain fats and proteins. Acorns from oak trees are most widely available along with pecans, bechnuts, and walnuts. Squirrels and chipmunks prefer hickory nuts, hazelnuts, black walnuts, and butternuts.

Grains and seeds constitute the major food of many species of wildlife. They mature in the summer and fall but some can



be found throughout the year. Seeds of conifers (evergreens) are also a good source of food.

Weeds probably contribute the most to food sources as they are so abundant and many times are favored by wildlife (not property owners) over more attractive yard plants. A good example is pigweed. It can contain nearly 100,000 seeds per plant!

Other favorite weeds are ragweed, smartweed, dock, and crabgrass.

Grains raised by farmers, such as oats, wheat, barley, rye, corn, grain sorghum, and soybeans provide abundant food. In recent years, whitetail deer, which have thrived despite urbanization, cause millions of dollars of crop losses for farmers, especially to corn, soybean, and hay fields.

For example, in Maryland the deer population has increased from 20,000 in 1981 to over 300,000 currently.

Vegetative parts of plants are sought by rodents, browsing and grazing mammals, and some gamebirds. Deer, antelope, and rabbits are especially fond of alfalfa and clover hays.

Also, we must not forget aquatic plants such as wild rice, widgeongrass, pond weeds, and wild celery. They are a favorite of ducks, geese, muskrats, beaver, moose, and sometimes deer.

The roots, bulbs and tubers of plants which are underground are consumed by moles, gophers, wild turkeys, ducks, geese, and muskrats.

And nectar from plants is sought by hummingbirds, moths, and bees. Plants that successfully attract nectar feeders include trumpet honeysuckle vine, cardinal bush, paintbrush, bee balm, petunias, and morning glory.

Wildlife will often use an abundant food source almost exclusively when it becomes available. Good examples are nuts and fruits. Squirrels and Blue Jays store acorns, hickory nuts, and walnuts for later use. Deer and bears develop a thick layer of fat by feeding on acorns.

Insects are another vital food source, especially for songbirds, quail, and pheasants. If you use insecticides to kill pests on your property, be careful and use with restraint.

Providing a variety of foods is probably the most important part of your



wildlife habitat. Selection can be made for a diversity of food types for plants that mature at different times or for those that retain their fruits well into winter.

If you can not plant trees or shrubs on your property, establish a year-round feeding and watering station and offer your wildlife sunflower seeds, thistle seeds, and perhaps some grains such as cracked corn or grain sorghum.

Weather impacts mightily on food sources for wildlife. Early heavy spring rains and early frosts can curtail food production. An early snow can cover all the fruit and seeds that have fallen to the ground. Sleet and ice storms make it impossible for wildlife to find food.

Plant species also vary in production from one year to another. Sometimes acorns or walnuts are almost non-existent and in other years there is an abundant crop.

### Cover

Cover is right behind food in importance. It is needed for wildlife to survive and to have protection from weather and predators. Cover is critically important for nesting and raising of young. It is also necessary when wildlife sleeps or rests.

Cover provides protection through concealment and impenetrability to predators.

And cover provides protection from rain, snow, sleet, wind, heat, and cold. Many plants provide both cover and food.

There are many different kinds of cover. It can be trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers, rock piles, brush piles, field crops such as corn, grain sorghum and soybeans, cut banks, hollow trees, bird houses, burrows, bridges, abandoned buildings, fence rows, and hedgerows.

It is important for cover to be close to food and water. **The more exposed wildlife is, the higher the mortality rate from predators.**

Hedgerows are one of the most valuable types of cover, as they also provide food in a protected environment. Common hedgerow plants that establish themselves naturally are dogwood, honeysuckle, red bud, wild cherry, and, unfortunately for the property owner, poison ivy.

### Water

Water is also essential for all wildlife species. They must have it to survive. Usually a pond or stream serves the purpose, along with rain collected in the



hollows at the base of tree limbs, or puddles left after a rain.

Plants also provide water. Rabbits and rodents obtain it by eating leaves. Mammals sometimes get it from dew on grass. And a large source comes from fruits and all types of berries which have a high water content.

One of your biggest challenges is to preserve and manage the water in your habitat where it exists and, if absent, add new sources such as ponds, fountains, or baths. Many hours of enjoyment can result from watching songbirds take a bath in your pond or bird bath.

### Space

Each wildlife species has specific needs as far as territory or amount of space to roam in and to breed. A ruffed grouse or quail pair need about 10 acres, while others, such as wild turkey, may need 100 acres of woodland.

Wood ducks and purple martins do not defend territory around their nests. But, bluebirds need at least 300 feet between houses and about five acres for each pair.

The first three habitat requirements – food, cover, and water can be manipulated by man but space may be more difficult. Increasing a species variety can be achieved by providing a mixture of habitats with plants, trees, and shrubs in various stages of development.

An example of species variety is when you want to attract all types of songbirds because you like to watch them eat at bird feeders located near your house. This is possible by providing different kinds of seed such as thistle, sunflower, or peanut.

Or, if you have an acreage or farm, maybe you want to increase the number of pheasant or quail on your property because you like to hunt.

In order to attract the birds, you might plant a few rows of corn, grain sorghum, or millet on your property, next to fence rows or hedgerows, and not harvest the grain in the fall so it can be eaten over the cold winter months by wildlife. Make sure you also have adequate water and cover available.

You should know the needs of each species you want to attract. The result can be a stable and varied wildlife population. To attract a specific species, you'll need to manipulate vegetation so that the cover, food, and water are less limiting for that species. If the species you want to attract requires a variety of habitat needs, you'll be able to plan for that also.

## BEST SHRUBS FOR WILDLIFE

Shrubs	Benefits for Wildlife	Wildlife Attracted
<b>Arrowwood</b>	Berries, Foliage	Grouse, Cedar Waxwing, Brown Thrasher, Squirrel, Deer
<b>Azalea, Flame</b>	Leaves, Nectar	Hummingbird, Deer, Butterflies, other insects
<b>Blackhaw</b>	Berries, Foliage	Grouse, Cedar Waxwing, Brown Thrasher, Squirrel, Deer
<b>Elderberry</b>	Berries, Nectar	Woodpeckers, Blue Jay, Thrushes, Grosbeaks, Rabbit, Squirrel
<b>Mountain Laurel</b>	Nectar	Butterflies, other insects
<b>Spicebush</b>	Berries	Thrushes, Catbird, Kingbird
<b>Sumac, Shining</b>	Fruit, Twigs, Foliage	Quail, Bluebird, Catbird, Robin, Mockingbird, Rabbit, Deer
<b>Sumac, Smooth</b>	Fruit, Twigs, Foliage	Quail, Bluebird, Catbird, Robin, Mockingbird, Rabbit, Deer
<b>Sumac, Staghorn</b>	Fruit, Twigs, Foliage	Quail, Bluebird, Catbird, Robin, Mockingbird, Rabbit, Deer
<b>Wax Myrtle</b>	Berries	Quail, Bluebird, Catbird, Tree Swallow, Yellow-rumped Warbler
<b>Witchhazel</b>	Seeds, Twigs	Grouse, Deer

*Note: Plants mentioned in this publication are somewhat generic. Please contact your state native plant society or department of natural resources for appropriate native plants for your area.*

*This article was written by Thomas D. Patrick, President and Founder of the WindStar Wildlife Institute, a national, non-profit conservation organization whose mission is to help individuals and families establish or improve the wildlife habitat on their properties.*

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