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CREATING A HEALTHY YARD

Yards are personal havens for recreation, rest, and relaxation. By adopting a few basic principles, your yard can become a sanctuary for wildlife as well. As you create habitat that supports birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, you also ensure that your yard remains healthy for you and your family. And by learning about the plants and animals native to your area, you renew your connection with the natural world.

WHY “BIRDSCAPE”?

Birdscaping—providing food, water, protective cover, and nesting sites for birds—offers a lifetime of learning, excitement, and entertainment while helping local bird populations. Over 650 bird species nest in North America, and a birdscaped yard can connect you with dozens of local resident birds and many additional migratory species that will stop by as they travel across the hemisphere. Many backyard birds are summer visitors that spend their winters in Central America and South America, while others are winter visitors that spend their summers in northern boreal forests. Birdscaping can help to ensure the survival of the many individuals that winter, nest, or migrate through your area each year.

While bird feeders and a source of water will easily attract the more common bird species to your yard, the best way to attract and help most birds is to plant native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. These plants provide the nesting, roosting, and foraging opportunities that your local birds need, and can help to replace natural habitats destroyed, degraded, and fragmented by development. Consult with your local NRCS office to identify native plants suited to the local soil conditions. For more information on how to attract and help the birds in your area, visit www.audubonathome.org/forthebirds.

BATS

Bats are an often overlooked part of our local environment. In the United States, 47 bat species inconspicuously patrol the night skies. Many can

consume 30–50 percent of their body weight in insects each night. Since some species can devour up to 600 mosquitoes or other insects each hour, bats are an important part of a natural insect control system. Other bats eat fruit and nectar and play an important role in pollinating native plants and dispersing seeds. Contrary to popular opinion, bats are not aggressive and they do not play a significant role in transmitting rabies to humans. To invite these sophisticated creatures to your yard, you can install a bat house at a height of at least 10 feet on a structure that faces the morning sun. For bat house designs and more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/bats.

BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies can be persuaded to visit a yard of any size. Over 700 butterfly species inhabit the United States, and local species will visit your yard if you invite them by planting appropriate flowering plants as food for the adults, and additional vegetation as host plants for their eggs and the caterpillars. Some butterfly species are declining in number due to pesticide use, habitat loss, or unusual climate conditions; providing the appropriate plants for these species may help them to recover. For more information about which species reside in or migrate through your community, and to learn which plants to provide for them, visit www.audubonathome.org/butterflies.

THE OTHER “B”

Most of the bees that pollinate native plants do not live together in hives. Many of these native solitary bees are declining, but you may be able to help them by building a bee box. Simply drill small holes into an untreated block of wood, or tie a bundle of dried stems together and place them outdoors. Solitary bees will lay their eggs in the holes, which then serve as a nursery. For more information on how to help these beneficial insects, visit www.audubonathome.org/solitarybees.

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Share your wildlife habitat with your human neighbors as well. Show them your native plants and your efforts to help birds and other wildlife. Tell them about your stand against pesticides and your commitment to making your property as welcoming to wildlife as possible. Then invite them to take actions of their own. Begin a neighborhood nature club or wildlife association, and challenge people to dedicate part of their yard to wildlife. Link your habitat with that of adjoining neighbors to create a larger area of viable, pesticide-free and cat-free habitat. Note the changes you begin to see. Are there more birds and what kind? How about pollinators? What new animals tend to linger in your yard or community? Keep a record of what you see, and celebrate each exciting wildlife encounter with your friends and neighbors. For more information on working together to help birds and other wildlife in your community, visit www.audubonathome.org/neighborhood.

HEALTHY YARD PLEDGE

Create and maintain a healthy environment for you, your family, and local wildlife by pledging to:

- ✓ Reduce pesticide use
- ✓ Conserve water
- ✓ Protect water quality
- ✓ Remove invasive exotic plants
- ✓ Plant native species
- ✓ Support wildlife on your property

Visit www.audubonathome.org/pledge to make the pledge online.

The **AUDUBON AT HOME** website contains information and downloadable resources to help you plan and develop your property in a wildlife-friendly way. You'll find regional resources and information about the birds, other wildlife, and native plants in your area. Visit www.audubonathome.org.

NRCS'S BACKYARD CONSERVATION website also shows ways to help the environment and to make your yard more attractive and enjoyable. Visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard.

AN INVITATION TO A HEALTHY YARD



Invite Birds, Bats, and Butterflies to YOUR YARD

- 1 Tree cavities can be difficult for nesting birds to find in many developed areas. **BIRDHOUSES** offer a good alternative. Chickadees, titmice, wrens, and even screech-owls are some of the birds that might take up residence in appropriately sized nest boxes.
- 2 Carefully placed **BIRD FEEDERS** provide opportunities to watch birds at close range. Different feeders are designed for different seeds, so choose appropriate seeds and feeders for the birds in your area.
- 3 **NATIVE PLANTS**, including trees, shrubs, and groundcover, create multiple layers of attractive habitat for birds and beneficial insects. Plant shrubs in a way that best mimics natural habitat, and use them around the foundation of your home and the borders of your yard.
- 4 A source of **WATER**, such as a well-maintained birdbath or small pond, will attract birds and beneficial insects such as butterflies. Shallow edges allow birds to bathe and drink without getting too wet.



For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/yard • For individual copies of this poster, call 1-888-LANDCARE.

- 5 Hummingbirds may be attracted to a **HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER**, especially when the feeder is placed among red or yellow tube-shaped wildflowers.
- 6 A **BUTTERFLY GARDEN** of native wildflowers, including plants that provide food for caterpillars, will attract a host of winged jewels to your yard.
- 7 A **BAT HOUSE** mounted on your house may provide an important roosting site for these nocturnal insect hunters.
- 8 An estimated 1 billion birds die each year from crashing into windows. Decorate the outside surface of your **WINDOWS** to make the glass visible to birds, or install screens as a barrier to keep them at a distance.
- 9 **CATS** kill millions of birds and other native animals each year. Keep your cat indoors to protect birds, as well as to keep your cat safe and healthy.

BIRDS TO HELP IN YOUR YARD

When designing and maintaining the habitat in your yard, try to provide food, shelter, and nesting sites for five or six bird species that need the most support in your region of the country. Then keep a close watch to see how the birds respond to your efforts. To determine which species near you need the most help, and to find ways to help support them on your property, visit www.audubonathome.org/birdstohelp.

My target species

Action points
