

Planning Your Habitat Garden

Some things to consider as you begin planning your habitat garden:



Attracting Birds

Creating a bird habitat begins with thoughtful planning. Incorporate native plants that offer food, shelter, and nesting areas. Ensure a diverse vegetation layer with trees, shrubs, and ground-cover. Add berry-bearing shrubs for additional sustenance. Install birdhouses and nesting boxes, provide a fresh water source, and add a few bird feeders during the winter months. With patience and dedication, you'll transform your space into a thriving bird habitat, enriching your connection with nature.

Attracting beneficial insects

Simply scattering flowering native plants around a garden will attract beneficial insects, such as wasps, beetles, flies, true bugs, and lacewings. Native flowering plants will invite pollinators, seed dispersers, and recyclers, which all are key in supporting nature's balance. Non-native plants will not provide pollinators with enough nectar, pollen or nesting opportunities, but a diverse range of native plants will.



Considering your soil

The soil is the foundation of your garden and must provide needed nutrients for your plants to thrive. There are many varieties of soil and nutrient content: sandy, clay loam, acidic, well-drained, organic. Before you plant, test your soil. VA Tech (through your county extension office) offers comprehensive tests for minimum cost and will give you guidelines to ensure your soil provides needed nutrients. Although it's not as glamorous, getting your soil right is the first step to building a great garden habitat.

Where's the water?

With regard to water, the first two focal points to consider in a new habitat garden are avoiding (or preventing) erosion and providing a water source for wildlife. Frequently gardeners forget that all wildlife – birds, insects, mammals, etc. - needs sources of water. We can protect natural sources like ponds and creeks, and we can offer supplemental sources like birdbaths or even puddles of water.



Landscaping

Subtle landscaping can enhance and beautify even a totally natural habitat. Thoughtful choice and placement of plants will not only allow each plant to shine in its environment but will highlight the natural beauty of all the plants in the garden

Native Plants

Did you know that native plants have deeper roots than exotic and alien plants? They have evolved and learned to thrive here in our climate and soil conditions. Their deep roots channel the water and help prevent erosion, and they form beneficial relationships with the multitude of soil organisms. And, native plants support local wildlife while exotic and alien plants do not. Notice the Monarch Butterfly caterpillar in the photo.



Invasive Plants

An invasive plant is one that is native somewhere else - not here. Some get into our environment by deliberate action of humans –as exotic plants that later escape cultivation. Some get here accidentally, perhaps in the packing material in foreign imports. Once in our environment they cause harm in a variety of ways, especially by crowding out the native plants that normally support our wildlife and biodiversity.

Types of Habitat Gardens to consider:

- Wild backyard
- Edge of manicured backyard
- Pollinator garden
- Rain garden
- Bioswale garden
- Island of trees
- Meadow or mini-meadow
- And many variations

Resources:

- "Habitat at Home" by Carol Heiser
 - publication of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
- New Naturalism* by Kelly Norris – published by Cool Springs Press
- Wildscapes* by Nancy Lawson – published by Princeton Architectural Press



"We can never replace what we have lost, but we can all work together to restore precious Native Habitat"

Goochland Powhatan Master Gardeners Assoc.
www.gpmga.org

Goochland Extension Office
804-556-5841 <https://goochland.ext.vt.edu>

Powhatan Extension Office
804-598-5640 <https://powhatan.ext.vt.edu>



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.