

Landscaping on the Edge: Creating Wildlife Habitat

By Nanette Masi

More & more gardeners are finding that incorporating native plants into their gardens, not only adds natural beauty, but attracts birds and butterflies for their enjoyment. With increased development, newer homes may be constructed close to wetlands regulated by the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act. Although these wetland areas may not be disturbed without strict approval from the local Conservation Commission, plantings of native species are allowed within the 100 foot buffer zone (310 CMR 10-02(2)(b)), with proper siltation and erosion controls. This buffer zone area offers an excellent opportunity to create beautiful native plant habitat gardens that further protect the existing wetlands. You'll get much more enjoyment out of buzzing habitat gardens than lifeless lawn.

Why Native? Native species have co-evolved with our native birds & butterflies. Native plants are adapted to local soils and climates. They also require less water, fertilizer & pest control. They stay put, as a members of an ecological community where the natural balance keeps each species in check. Birds and other wildlife greatly depend on a healthy supply of insects; insects that have used these plants for thousands of years. Native Americans & colonists relied on many native plants in their culture for food, dyes, or medicines; and they are still useful today.

Go organic. Aside from the fact that pesticides are hazardous to your health, organic care will help re-balance your landscape, especially your soil, the key to the health of your ecosystem. Only 1% of all insects species are pests. Just one application of a

pesticide can kill all beneficial insects—taking years to recover. Nature has a way of controlling pests with a variety of beneficial insects, birds, frogs, etc, but it sometimes takes more time. Patience will usually reward you.

Remove Invasives: Some examples include: Burning bush euonymus, oriental bittersweet, most bush honeysuckles, buckthorn, Japanese barberry, purple loosestrife. Visit www.invasiveplants.net.

Create your habitat:

Test your soil to match plants to conditions. Analyze the site for light direction, wind, usage, etc. Brainstorm native plants and check off habitat components.

Borrow ideas from Nature. Take a look around nearby natural areas and hiking trails for natural inspiration. Incorporate the patterns you see into your planting design.

Include as many components of successful wildlife habitat as possible: Copy Mother Nature. Provide a year-round food supply, water, shelter, cover & nesting sites. Combine a diversity of plants to create structural layering for different bird species as well as attractive design. Include host plants for caterpillars as well as nectar plants for butterflies & hummingbirds. Save your snags. Include grit, puddling areas and stone walls.

Easy Natural Maintenance: Leave leaves and let compost happen. Prevent weeds by smothering with mulch and filling the space with plants. Disturb the soil as little as possible. Sheet mulch lawn and plant through for easy transition to habitat.

Go Wild! Let plants grow naturally and aim for "untamed control. Let plants attract insects for spring and fall migrants to feed on as well as for parents feeding their young in the summer.

Recommended Native Plants: *Use soil tests and consider the conditions to help choose the right plants for that particular area. Find inspiration from natural communities and fill the space!

Summer Berries (May-Sept.):

Serviceberry, Juneberry, Shadblow

Amelanchier Canadensis

Spicebush, *Lindera benzoin*

Highbush Blueberry, *Vaccinium corymbosum*

Lowbush Blueberry, *Vaccinium angustifolium*

Mapleleaf Viburnum, *Viburnum acerifolium*

Arrowwood, *Viburnum sericea* or *V. recognitum*

Fall Berries attract 47+ species of birds: Critical for winter migrants such as wood thrush, bluebird, catbird, f. mockingbird, & grosbeaks and for overwintering songbirds & animals.

Bunchberry, *Cornus Canadensis*

Flowering Dogwood, *Cornus florida*

Pagoda dogwood, *Cornus alternifolia*

Black Cherry, *Prunus serotina*

Red Chokeberry, *Aronia arbutifolia*

Red-twig dogwood, *Cornus stolonifera*

Gray dogwood, *Cornus racemosa*

Amer. Elderberry, *Sambucas canadensis*

Fall Nuts & Tree/Shrub Seed Sources:

Oaks; White Oak, *Quercus alba*.

Hickories; Shagbark Hickory, *Carya ovata*

American beech, *Fagus grandifolia*

Beaked hazelnut, *Corylus cornuta*

Maples; Red Maple, *Acer rubrum*

American Sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*

Sweet Pepperbush, *Clethra alnifolia*

Persistent Winter Fruits: "Spinach" plants get cold weather birds and animals through winter when little food is left. Persistent fruits are available to spring migrants.

Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*

Hawthorn, *Crataegus phaenopyrum*

Sumacs; Staghorn sumac, *Rhus typhina*

American Cranberrybush, *Viburnum trilobum*

Arrowwood, *Viburnum sericea*

Sweet Pepperbush, *Clethra alnifolia*

Bearberry, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*

Virginia creeper, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

Northern Bayberry, *Myrica pensylvanica*

Partridgeberry, *Mitchella repens*

Teaberry, *Gaultheria procumbens*

Conifers & Winter Cover Evergreens for protection, seeds, fruits & nesting sites: Important for many songbirds such as robin, chickadee, cedar waxwing, catbird, brown thrasher, mourning dove, bluejay, wood thrush, pine& evening grosbeaks, purple finch, goldfinch:

Trees:

Balsam Fir, *Abies balsama*

Hemlock, *Tsuga Canadensis*

White Pine, *Pinus strobus*

Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*

Shrubs:

Mountain Laurel, *Kalmia latifolia* (many smaller cultivars)

Inkberry, *Ilex glabra* (smaller cultivars)

Fetterbush, *Pieris x 'Browers Beauty'*

Deciduous trees for nesting (trees tending towards hollowness): Many overwintering and returning bird species depend on hollows for cover and nesting, including many owls, chickadees, woodpeckers, etc.

Maples; Sugar Maple, *Acer saccharum*

Tupelo, *Nyssa sylvatica*

Oaks; White oak, *Quercus alba*

Fall Grasses: Tall grasses are used by many birds for nesting, incl. ovenbird, robin.

Northern Sea Oats, *Chasmanthium latifolium*

Switch grass, *Panicum virgatum*

Little Bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*

Tufted Hairgrass, *Deschampsia caespitosa*

Wildflowers Seeds, Seeds are critical in late summer, early fall for migrants preparing for trip and for overwinterers.

Purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*

Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia fulgida*

NE Aster, *Symphotrichum novae-angliae*

Blazing star, *Liatris spicata*

Nectar: The great pollinator, butterfly & hummingbird attractant. Red, tubular flowers are especially attractive to hummingbirds.

Milkweeds; Butterflyweed,

Asclepias tuberosa

Wild Columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*

Fringed bleeding heart, *Dicentra eximia*

Beebalm, *Monarda didyma*

Cardinal flower, *Lobelia cardinalis*

Jewelweed or Touch-me-not, *Impatiens capensis*

Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia fulgida*

Honeysuckle Vine, *Lonicera sempervirens*

Host Plants for Butterfly & Moth Caterpillars:

Milkweeds, Swamp Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*, Monarchs

Violets, *Viola sp.*—Fritillaries

Little Bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*, Skippers

Spicebush, *Lindera benzoin* & Sassafras—Spicebush Swallowtail & Viceroy

Willow, *Salix sp.*, Cherry, *Prunus sp.*, Birch, *Betula sp.*—Tiger Swallowtail

References

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- *Planting Noah's Garden: Further Adventures in Backyard Ecology*. Sara Stein. 1997.
- *Native Trees, Shrubs, & Vines*, William Cullina, 2002
- *Wildflowers*, William Cullina. 2000.
- *American Plants for American Gardens*, Edith Roberts & Elsa Rehmman, 1929
- *Caterpillars*, Amy Bartlett Wright, 1993, a Peterson Guide
- *A Pocket Guide to Butterflies & Moths*, Elizabeth Balmer. 2007
- *Good Bugs for your Garden*, Allison Starcher, 1995
- *Good Bug, Bad Bug*, Jessica Walliser, 2008
- *Common-Sense Pest Control, Least-toxic solutions for your home, garden, pets & community*, William Olkowski, Sheila Daar, & Helga Olkowski. 1991

Websites:

Ecological Landscaping Association, www.ecolandscaping.org, Natick, MA, 617-436-5838
New England Wild Flower Society, www.newfs.org, Framingham, MA 508-877-7630.
Smaller American Lawns Today (SALT), arboretum.conncoll.edu/salt/salt.html
UConn Plant Database, www.hort.uconn.edu/Plants/index.html. Great descriptions and pictures.
National Wildlife Federation, www.nwf.org (backyard habitat certification)

Nurseries that sell Native Plants:

New England Wildflower Society, Garden In the Woods, Framingham, MA
Nasami Farm, NEWFS, Whately, MA
Weston Nurseries, Southboro, MA
Russell's Garden Center, Wayland, MA
Bigelow Nurseries, Northboro, MA
Stratham Circle Nursery, Stratham, NH
Wild Earth Native Plant Nursery, 1-908-308-9777

Pesticide Free Lawn Sign: Order from EHHI, Environment & Human Health, Inc.

1191 Ridge Road
North Haven, CT 06473
Phone: 203-248-6582
www.ehhi.org

Soil Testing through UMass Amherst: www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest, (413) 545-2311