



10 Simple Ways to Make a Difference



There is much you can do to protect our environment, starting in your own backyard.

“If I can only do one or two things for wildlife, what will really make a difference?”

Faced with so many eco-friendly product claims and choices that impact wildlife and the environment, people often ask us what are the most important things they can do contribute to wildlife conservation. In response, we’ve assembled a list of our top 10 suggestions for maximizing biodiversity on your property and getting the greatest benefit from your stewardship efforts.

1. Plant native plants

Make a conscientious effort to plant native plants in your landscape. Set a goal of maintaining at least 80% of the trees, shrubs, and flowers on your property with native species. Surveying your property and nearby natural areas can help you determine which species will grow best in your area.

Purchase plants from locally-grown sources when possible. These will tend to be best adapted to local growing conditions.

The Benefits:

- Contributes to the conservation of regional biodiversity.
- Showcases the uniqueness and beauty of your area.
- Provides food and cover for native wildlife.
- Because native plants are well adapted to local climate and soil conditions, they often require less maintenance than non-native species

2. Naturalize

Consider potential locations and ways you might modify your existing landscape to include more or different plantings. By naturalizing unused or minimally-used parts of your property, you’ll provide better habitat.

Incorporate naturally-landscaped areas in phases so that you can learn and experiment with what works best for your property before making a major investment of time or money.

The Benefits:

- Provides needed food and cover for wildlife from an increased diversity of plants.
- Contributes to overall habitat in a local area, especially when naturalized areas connect between properties.
- Lowers maintenance costs and reduces the need for high-intensity maintenance.
- Supports aesthetic appreciation for natural beauty.

3. Add variety

Plant various heights and types of plants, from ground cover to shrub and tree layers. In woodlands, leave understory shrubs, non-woody plants, and leaf litter. Some species prefer to live in treetops while others like shrubby undergrowth; still others spend their lives on the ground. Adding variety creates more levels of the food chain and helps a diversity of species find their preferred habitat needs.

The Benefits:

- Allows a greater variety of wildlife species to take advantage of landscaped areas and habitats on your property.
- A diversity of plants attracts a diversity of wildlife.

4. Maintain water for wildlife

Maintain at least one water source for wildlife. This could be a simple backyard birdbath with a mister or drip attachment, or a pond, stream, or wetland. If you have a pond or stream, don't remove plants growing along the water's edge. Instead, plant a variety of aquatic plants along the shoreline.

The Benefits:

- Offers an essential component of wildlife habitat.
- Creates a welcome refuge for many species.
- Adding aquatic plants maximizes a pond's value to wildlife.



Learn more about the native plants and wildlife species that make your area unique.

5. Get to know your region

Take time to explore the natural areas closest to you. Make a commitment to visit at least one natural area this season. At a local nature preserve, woodland, wetland, or lake, you can begin to learn about the interconnections between plants and animals and their environment. Getting to know your region can enrich your experience of life in the world.

The Benefits

- Increases awareness and appreciation of the beauty and diversity of your local region.
- Increases understanding of the vital contribution that each region adds to the overall biodiversity of North America.
- Creates an informed, ecologically-literate citizenry.

6. Take care of the most sensitive species

Enhance and protect habitat for the most sensitive species present on your land. On many properties, this will likely be amphibians, such as frogs, toads, and salamanders. These species are especially vulnerable to habitat destruction because they typically require habitat both in water and on land, e.g., a pond for their eggs and larvae and dry land for the adults. They also need a way to move back and forth between the two safely.

The Benefits:

- By concentrating on the needs of sensitive species, you can take care of lots of others as well.
- Amphibian and reptile populations are declining rapidly all over the world. By doing simple things to help them survive on your property, you will contribute to overall conservation efforts.

Keeping track of the birds and other wildlife that visit your property will give you a good indication of how well your efforts are working.



7. Do not disturb!

Be careful not to disturb high quality habitats such as mature woods, wetlands, or desert areas—especially during the breeding season from April to early August. Take care not to remove bird nests or den sites. Disturbance to adults or young during the breeding season can reduce reproductive success and survival rates for young.

Designate areas that will be minimally-maintained, or use buffers or signs to keep people out.

The Benefits:

- Protects sensitive plants and wildlife
- Increases breeding success.
- Keeps larger habitat areas intact

8. Clean Up

Restore degraded habitats such as eroded slopes, compacted soils, and polluted water sources. Clean up trash. Litter is not only unsightly, it degrades plant and animal communities and water sources. If you have a dumpsite on your property, make a plan to break it up and properly dispose of its contents.

The Benefits:

- Promotes good stewardship of natural areas.
- Reduces habitat damage from eroding soils and polluted waters.
- Promotes proper waste management and disposal.
- Reduces build up of “trash heaps” and eliminates hazardous waste problems.

9. Maintain healthy soil

Much of the Earth’s great diversity lies below ground. Soil creatures, including earth worms, beetles, and ants, provide a vital support system for life above ground.

Add compost to gardens and landscaped areas to improve soil structure and soil health. Start a compost pile of your own to recycle organic waste and amend your soil.

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Avoid disturbances to soils such as driving on lawns (compacts soil structure) or using chemicals that wipe out soil life. These can destroy subsurface habitats, disrupt biological and chemical cycles, and alter subsurface food webs.

Improve drainage to help water percolate through the soil layers.

The Benefits:

- Healthy soils stimulate plant growth and help plants resist disease.
- Soil creatures cycle nutrients and carbon, degrade

10. Reduce your use of hazardous chemicals

Use an informed, integrated approach to dealing with pest problems that arise. Before reaching for chemicals, carefully evaluate the root of the problem and address underlying conditions. Research alternative pest control measures— from improved care of plants and soils to horticultural soaps and oils— there are many effective alternatives to chemicals.

Should you need to choose chemicals, read the label before you purchase: choose products with labels that read “caution” instead of “danger” when possible. Follow label instructions precisely: using more than called for increases the likelihood of environmental problems.

The Benefits:

- Reduces problems associated with chemical manufacture, storage, use, and waste disposal.
- Helps maintain a balance of beneficial insects.
- Reduces expense of chemical treatments.