



HCTF Education Habitats at Home

Learn how to create habitats that bring nature into your own backyard!

Make.. Naturescape Habitats



Purpose

The concept of Naturescaping is to protect, maintain and enhance wildlife habitat and native biodiversity by working with nature instead of against it. Wildlife have the same basic needs as we do - shelter, food, and water. For many creatures, these needs can be met by creating natural habitats right in your own backyard!

Whether you live in a city or in the country, you'll find some simple ways to welcome nature into your area and make it a more exciting place! Naturescaping is a large, rich subject, but even small changes and small places can make a difference. Not only is it good for wildlife, but natural landscaping can be beautiful and easy to care for. See below for even more benefits!

Benefits of Naturescaping

- Caring for wildlife habitat at home leads to an appreciation of the connectedness of all living things.
- Helps ensure the survival and genetic diversity in urban areas of native plants, insects and animals.
- Reduces your water consumption, because native plants are more water thrifty.
- Reduces the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, creating less pollution and keeping waterways pesticide free.
- Provides valuable habitat for small mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians and invertebrates.
- Becoming empowered with the knowledge that a single individual can make a difference.

Where to begin

When creating or enhancing habitat, consider the local conditions of your area. Is it marshy or dry? Sunny grassland or shaded forest? What kind of wildlife lives in nearby parks or natural areas? Just as you wouldn't plant a cactus in a swamp, you'll have the most success by working with the local climate and terrain.

Starting with a few habitat improvements, you will start to get to know your local ecosystem. Wildlife habitat areas can blend easily into adjacent, more traditional gardens. Here are some projects to get you started!

Habitats

Save that snag

If a tree dies in the garden, consider keeping it as a wildlife haven. A decaying or dead tree can be used by mammals, birds, and insects for feeding, nesting, hunting, and hibernating!

Instead of removing the tree, it can be cut back to a safe height. Planting a flowering vine such as honeysuckle at the base will add beauty as it climbs over the snag. Keep an eye out for woodpeckers excavating holes in the bark while looking for food. Woodpecker holes are used by many creatures as nesting sites.



Living log

A log or large branch can add interest to a garden bed, while providing excellent habitat. Placed in a shady location, a decaying log will become decorated with fungi, moss, and lichen. Amphibians such as toads and salamanders will be attracted to the cool, damp environment and the insects living in the wood. Piling a few logs together will create more habitats and attract a diversity of wildlife. You can also experiment with different types of wood.



Rock pile palace

A pile of rocks provides nooks and crannies for a variety of creatures. If the pile is near water, it can shelter amphibians. In a sunnier location, it provides a warm platform for basking reptiles. Rock piles shelter insects, including bumble bees, which may nest in a rock cavity.

Arrange your rock pile using stones of all sizes and shapes to create a variety of openings. You can add pieces of terracotta pots and drain tile to make tunnels among the rocks. How large should the pile be? The bigger the better!



Branching out

If bushes and thickets are scarce in your area, you can build one from fallen branches. Build up the branches beaver-lodge style, up to three meters high and wide. If the thought of a brush pile seems too untidy for you, stack logs in a pyramid and plant a climbing vine to grow over it. Brush piles shelter all kinds of wildlife, from nesting birds to overwintering butterflies. A brush pile will last about 10-15 years, or longer if you keep adding to it. Just make sure not to add to it during nesting season.



Puddles to ponds

Wildlife need water. A small source of water, such as a bird bath will attract thirsty birds, as well as bees and other insects. Birds bathe to keep their feathers in good condition. A deeper pool of the correct construction can support frogs and other amphibians who need water to reproduce. A pond is a large undertaking, but will reward you with a host of wildlife. To learn how to make a safe, healthy water feature, consult the Naturescape Provincial Guide listed below for details.



Get growing

While feeders will attract visitors to your yard today, planting the right plants will feed wildlife for years to come! Use the region-specific Naturescape guides listed below to learn what grows in your area and will suit your conditions. The Naturescape Provincial Guide will show you how to arrange plantings and naturescape your space. Using native plants is best, as they will thrive in your environment and provide a natural ecosystem for wildlife. Fruits, berries, nuts, seeds, and nectar will provide valuable nutrition for many creatures— including you!



Keeping wildlife safe

- Place bird feeders away from windows to prevent collisions, or break up the reflection of your window with decals.
- Protect naturescaped areas from cats, dogs, and other domestic animals as they can disturb shelters, destroy nests, and harm wildlife.
- Avoid the use of pesticides and other poisons, as they will harm beneficial insects, amphibians, and other creatures. Rat poison can kill predators, such as owls, that may eat a poisoned rodent.
- Keep wildlife out of your house by capping chimneys, putting wire mesh over vents, using wildlife-proof waste bins, and repairing damaged siding and shingles.

To learn more about Naturescaping, download free guides on the HCTF Education website. The Naturescape Provincial Guide is for all of BC, while the regional guides contain area-specific information such as local native plants.

www.hctfeducation.ca/product-category/books-and-guides/