

Woods provide food, water, shelter, and space

In Your Backyard Woods

Like humans, animals need food, water, shelter, and space. Your backyard woods has all these things, and is probably already hosting a lot of wildlife. In some woods, animals merely survive; in others, they thrive. You can do things to attract and support more and varied wildlife species.



Steve and Dave Maslowski
Maslowski Wildlife Productions

Planning Your Wildlife Habitat

Planning is key to helping you roll out the red carpet for wildlife. Start by learning what types of wildlife live in your area. This will clue you in to the possibilities for your woods.



Arthur C. Smith III, Grant Heilman Photography

Not all wildlife will make your woods their permanent home. Some will come to raise young, while others may simply pass through on their way to other places.

Once you know what you want and what you have, you can identify ways to enhance wildlife habitat. You already know that food, water, shelter, and space are the cornerstones of any wildlife habitat. And as you may have guessed, changing the amount or distribution of one or more of these can make your woods a more welcoming place for wildlife.

The Backyard Woods Diner

Food attracts wildlife, and your backyard woods diner is open around the clock. A variety of native trees, shrubs, and herbs will satisfy even the most finicky eaters. Providing a smorgasbord is the surest way to draw the customers you seek.

Bird feeders attract many eager customers like cardinals and blue jays. Place the feeder near your home, so you can enjoy seeing the birds. Joining Project Feeder Watch is another way you can help birds. Counting the number of birds visiting your feeder and sending the information to scientists will help their bird research.



Steve and Dave Maslowski
NACD, Backyard Conservation CD

Wet 'n Wildlife

If you have a stream, pond, lake, or wetland in your woods, count yourself fortunate. Most types of wildlife are drawn to water.

The Creature Comforts

Shelter offers safety from predators, as well as nesting and resting spaces. Wildlife don't require deluxe accommodations—a leaf, fallen log, or hole in the ground will do the job nicely. Piles of brush or rocks are great hiding spots for squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, snakes, and other small animals. Dead and dying trees make especially great shelters, if they are not hazardous.



Dennis Haugen

You can buy or build birdhouses and other boxes to add nesting cavities to your woods.



Jennifer E. Dacey, University of Rhode Island
www.insectimages.org

Space—The Third Dimension

Like a high-rise hotel, your woods extends vertically from the tree roots to the lofty treetops. The number of stops along the way could determine whether it rates as a one- or a five-star ticket to wildlife abundance. Adding vegetation of varying heights adds space for living things.



Some wildlife simply need more room to roam. Your woods may not be large, but if it's adjacent to others, you can join forces and create a multiplier effect. Talk to your neighbors about working together to manage your lands.

Did You Know . . . ?

Since the 1930s, whitetail deer, elk, pronghorn, and wild turkey populations have grown from near extinction to hundreds of thousands of elk and pronghorn and millions of deer and turkeys.



Melvin J. Baughman, University of MN Extension Service

In the Forest

Each year, millions of people visit the Nation's public and private forest lands to enjoy wildlife. Forest managers do their best to balance the needs of wildlife with those of humans. They create small openings, protect wetlands and other resources, put up nest boxes, and cooperate with neighboring landowners to enhance wildlife and habitat.

Managing lands for wildlife is a challenge. Some wildlife need a lot of space and large expanses of forest to be connected for travel corridors. This need for wildlife corridors magnifies the importance of everyone's backyard woods. The actions you take in your backyard woods can complement larger forests and provide great spaces for wildlife.



Dean Biggins, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
www.images.fws.gov

Family Activity: Apartment for Rent

Build an animal apartment house! Find an area in your woods that is away from human traffic. Explain that animals need shelter, just like people do. Some animals live underground, but others look for cracks and holes above ground.

You'll need:

- * Branches, sticks, and rocks
- * Heavy work gloves

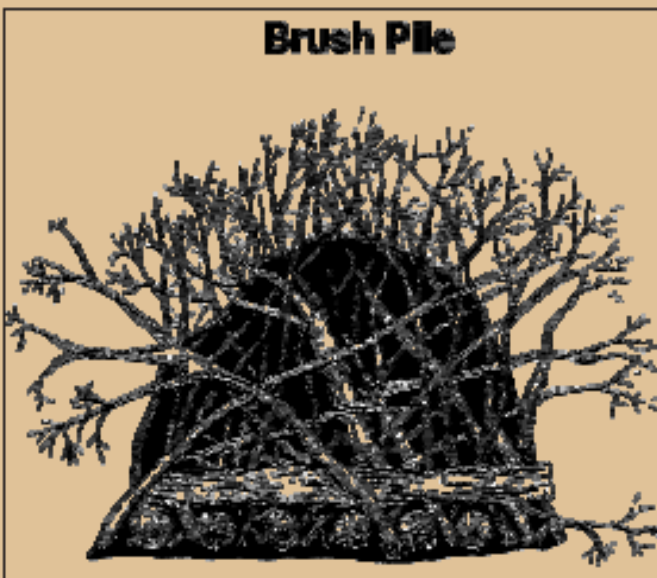
Use branches, sticks, and rocks to build a habitat for small animals. Pile the branches, using rocks or logs for support and layering. Make sure everyone is fully involved!

If you're really adventurous, build several apartment houses throughout the woods.



Melvin J. Baughman, University of Minnesota Extension Service

Brush Pile



State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources
Copyright, 1987, Reprinted with Permission

Visit them occasionally. Do you see any evidence of animals? Chipmunks and squirrels often will sit on the branches and eat seeds, so look for seed debris. Also, look for tracks and animal droppings—rabbits leave lots of traces. You might see a snakeskin or even a snake.

(Caution: Don't actually dig for evidence of snakes in your piles, especially if you live in areas with venomous snakes!)

Congratulate your family for helping to make your woods a welcoming place for wild creatures.