



Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts their commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisors' 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship



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Fairfax County Stewardship



Family Backyard

Wild Spaces in Local Places



Planting a native tree provides benefits now and in the future for you and local wildlife.

Did you know that **Monarch butterflies**, **American toads** and **Carolina wrens** all raise families in wildlife-friendly backyards in Fairfax County? Suburban habitats make excellent homes for native wildlife and plants. Individual families own more than half of the county's land, so Fairfax's wildlife needs wildlife-friendly backyards. Living close to nature benefits human families, too.

Outdoor play is good for your health

Dirt, grass stains, mud pies, twigs in the hair and rocks in the pockets are what growing up in nature is all about. Time with nature creates well-adjusted youth who improve academically, physically and creatively. Adults who spend time outdoors report lower stress and a more positive outlook. Go out and play!

Taking a step for nature

Commit to a chemical-free yard. Weeding is great exercise and won't harm insects, amphibians, kids or pets. The benefits are so great that it is worth asking neighbors to commit to chemical-free yards, too. Chemical-free yards might have a dandelion or two, but young dandelion leaves add a tangy twist to salads. (Don't eat dandelions if chemical fertilizers or pesticides have been added to your yard in the last two years). Chemical-free yards are also worry-free for outdoor play.



Chemical free yards are safe to touch, smell and explore.

Cues to care

Concerned about the unkempt appearance of a natural backyard? Here are simple tricks to establish a sense of order:

- ▶ **Use multiple plants of the same species.** Group three or more to create a focal point. Arrange flowers by color to attract butterflies.
- ▶ **Use linear features.** Fences, pathways or loose rock walls—which can provide habitat for small creatures—create a sense of structure.
- ▶ **Place logs** standing on end to provide seating and places for squirrels to crack open acorns.
- ▶ **Apply fresh, weed-free mulch** for a finished look on a suburban wildlife habitat.
- ▶ **Be outside in your yard.** Used landscapes are loved landscapes.



"Gardening, readers say, nurtures not only plants but people."
Contributor, Babycenter.com

Native wildlife, like this box turtle, can thrive in backyard habitats.

Shady characters

Fairfax County benefits from lots of trees. However, shade and roots make gardening difficult. Instead of grass, build a native habitat. Add shrubs and ground cover beneath shady trees to create nesting and foraging areas for birds. Anchor the shade garden with shrubs like **spicebush**, **blackhaw** or **arrowwood viburnum**. Add native ferns: **Christmas fern** stays green all winter. **Sensitive fern** grows well in wet or dry areas. **Wild ginger** and **creeping phlox** are flowering ground covers. A downed log provides habitat for salamanders and box turtles. Your garden will thrive on leaf mulch, which appears free every autumn. Enjoy the birds and caterpillars that flourish in this eco-friendly habitat.

Building a backyard treasure

Building a wildlife habitat for your family is a cure for the boring backyard. Who knows? There might be treasure lurking under those native shrubs -- a **robin's** blue eggshell, a **cardinal's** red feather, or the yellow and black striped caterpillar of a **monarch**.

Here are tips for wildlife- and family-friendly backyards:

Provide water. A small dish with a rock for a resting spot provides enough water to attract **Eastern tiger**

swallowtails or **painted lady**

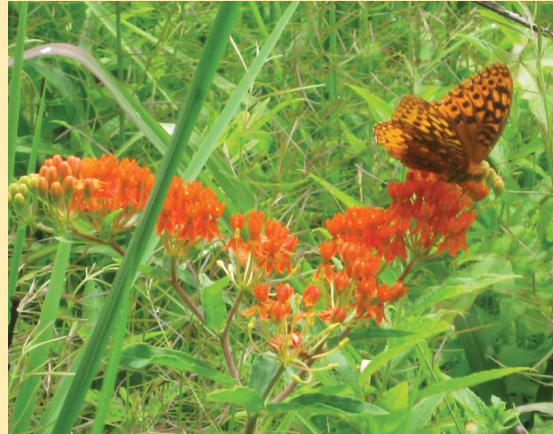
butterflies. Change often to prevent mosquitoes.

Provide shelter.

Standing dead trees, or snags, provide nesting spaces for **woodpeckers**

and **nuthatches.** Check with

your arborist to make sure the snag is strong enough to stay upright. Consider topping the snag (removing the crown) for more stability.



Native wildflowers, such as colorful butterfly milkweed, attract native pollinators including this fritillary butterfly. Milkweed is also the only food source for monarch butterfly caterpillars.



Create childhood memories by capturing lightning bugs and ladybugs in a yard that welcomes a variety of insects by using eco-friendly gardening practices.

Provide food. This means plants, lots of native plants: berry-producing shrubs like **highbush blueberry** or **spicebush**; nectar-producing flowers like **milkweed** and **asters**; nut-producing trees like **oaks** and **hickories**.

Provide a place to raise young.

A quiet space with plants as screening allows wildlife families to move in. Watch from a distance so wildlife moms and dads won't feel threatened. Kids will have a front row seat to nature in their own private backyard!

Provide space. Give back to nature. Convert traditional lawn to wildlife habitat. Butterflies and birds adapt well to garden habitats.

Provide stewardship. Let leaves stay where they fall in a native backyard habitat. They'll compost in place and won't need to be trashed. Add up to four inches of extra leaves from a grassy area to the native habitat .

For additional tips on creating safe, wildlife-friendly habitats, go to <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/nature-history/greenspring/infosheets/nativeplantsforbirds.pdf>

Plants for toddlers

The very young can interact with nature in a safe, wildlife-friendly backyard.

Parsley, **dill**, **marigolds**, **nasturtiums** and **zinnia** are a wildlife and toddler-friendly mix. Older kids will have fun adding perennials



Dig in the garden to discover what lives underground. You may uncover worms, millipedes and other curious creatures.

and natives to the backyard habitat, encouraging a wider variety of wildlife visitors. The family-friendly backyard is an open canvas, an opportunity to grow with nature. Ensure plants are edible, and avoid potential choking hazards. **Azalea**, **Japanese barberry**, **Oriental bittersweet**, **buttercups**, **winged burning bush** and **periwinkle** are non-native and poisonous if eaten. Native plants are generally safer because they are well-studied. Only a few are toxic. They also need less care and watering.

If not you, who? Small things.

What's more family friendly than an edible garden?

Plant **Pawpaw trees**, a fruit tree native to North

America. Deer-resistant pawpaw has large leaves reminiscent of a tropical jungle, and at only 15 feet tall, pawpaws are perfectly sized for our backyards. The fruit is custardy and tropical-tasting.

If not you, who? Big things.

Let the grass grow longer. "Mowing long," to at least three inches saves on water and fertilizer. Taller grass encourages deeper roots. Save the time spent on mowing to enjoy your backyard habitat.

