

# Creating a Healthy Backyard — Simple Steps for a Lively Garden

CHALLENGE



NODDING ONION / STEVEN J. SAFER



CHUCK YOUNGER

Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.  
RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Assessing your yard's existing conditions is the first step towards designing your future wildlife habitat.

A healthy backyard is one that teems with life...it might include dragonflies, wrens, toads, and millions of tiny organisms barely visible. It may be big or small, but it's toxin free and water wealthy. It's a warm and welcoming place that can also be an integral part of the ecosystems of the Delaware Valley.

Birds and wildlife require the same basics as people: food, cover, water, and space. Adding bird feeders, native plants, water features, and nest sites helps create a supportive and healthy habitat for a variety of wild neighbors.



Above clockwise: A pocket habitat garden in its second year a) quickly emerges, b) collects energy from the sun, c) bursts into bloom and finally d) goes dormant in late fall. In each season, this garden in Blue Bell provides resources for birds, insects and other wildlife.

Left: Under a blanket of snow lies the promise of spring. The seeds of many native plants require periods of cold conditioning or stratification that facilitates the germinating of the seeds in the spring.



STEVEN J. SAFFIER

ALL PHOTOS STEVEN J. SAFFIER





A well-stocked bird feeder is an irresistible invitation to birds and should be part of the plan.



## What you have

Draw a base map and make a list of everything that exists in the yard including impervious surfaces, trees and other landscaping, existing bird feeders and lawn area.

Note what areas are sunny or shady, the soil moist or dry. Is there a vegetable garden or favorite apple tree? How much lawn is there and how much is needed?

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## What you want

Design a layout plan, determine how much and which part of the yard you're ready to dedicate to a woodland garden, meadow, rain garden, etc. Include these points in your goals:

- Preserve existing native vegetation and choose others that are well suited to the conditions of your property.
- Begin with trees and add layers.
- Plant with repetition: instead of "one of everything," plant several individuals of the same species (see "From the Ground Up", page 69).
- Increase vertical and horizontal connectivity to allow wildlife to readily move throughout.
- Spread the word: encourage habitat restoration, native landscaping, and the elimination of pesticide use in your neighborhood and community.



## Plants with High Wildlife Value

(see also “Butterfly and Hummingbird Plants”, page 75)



TARA BURGY

Eastern white pine

Common Name	Scientific name	Sun	Soil	Height in feet
<b>Trees, large</b>				
Red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	All	M	40–60
Sugar maple	<i>Acer saccharum</i>	PS, Sh	M	60–75
American beech	<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>	All	M	50–70
Eastern white pine	<i>Pinus strobes</i>	All	M–D	50–80
White oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>	All	M–D	50–100
Chestnut oak	<i>Quercus montana</i>	PS, Sh	D	40–75
Pin oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>	FS, PS	All	60–70
Red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	FS, PS	M–D	60–80
Eastern hemlock	<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	All	M	40–70
<b>Shrubs or small trees</b>				
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier arboriea</i>	All	M–D	15–25
Alternate-leaved dogwood	<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>	PS–Sh	M	15–25
Flowering dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>	PS–Sh	M	10–30
Winterberry (holly)	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	All	W–M	6–10
Spicebush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	PS–Sh	W–M	6–12
Elderberry	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	All	W–M	5–15
Lowbush blueberry	<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	FS–PS	M–D	1–2
Highbush blueberry	<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	All	W–M	6–12
Arrowwood	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	All	W–M	3–15

### KEY

#### Soil

W Wet

M Moist

D Dry

#### Sun

FS Full sun

PS Partial sun

Sh Shade

# The Morway Garden — The Way to More Wildlife

CHAMPION



BUCKINGHAM

MAGGIE STRUCKER

MAGGIE STRUCKER



Green frogs share the picturesque pond with water striders and dragonflies.

Phyllis and Don Morway have planned their yard to be an inviting habitat for flora and fauna and when you step inside, you can feel this all around you.

As you approach the Morway garden, you are greeted by a chorus of wonderful sounds. The chirping of birds surrounds you. Listen closer and you will hear the buzzing of bees and the calming trickle of running water. You may be able to hear the croak of a bullfrog that lives in the pond or the whirr of a hummingbird's wings. This garden is alive with sounds, scents, and color. Phyllis and Don Morway have planned their yard to be an inviting habitat for flora and fauna; and when you step inside, beauty and life is all around you.

Phyllis has long been an avid birder and nature lover and has been participating in citizen science programs such as the Christmas Bird Count since 1994. She realized that it was not only the seed she put out that would attract the birds, but also an all-inclusive habitat that would provide food, shelter, and water. More than a decade ago, this zealous gardener came up with a landscaping scheme to expand the border garden to provide better habitat and reduce the lawn area of their home. The Morways contracted a landscape company to install some of the initial alterations and since that time, Phyllis *and nature* have nurtured the space into the bustling habitat that thrives today.

There are many different environments within the one-acre garden. The shade garden, where at least a half dozen bird feeders reside, includes foamflower, ferns, pachysandra, and a springtime blanket of violets.

The picturesque pond with the tiny waterfall is home to arrowhead, narrow-leaved cattail and waterlilies. The green frogs have moved in and share this place with water striders and dragonflies. The Great Blue Heron that visits may strike fear in the hearts of the resident fish but triggers delight in the hearts of human onlookers.

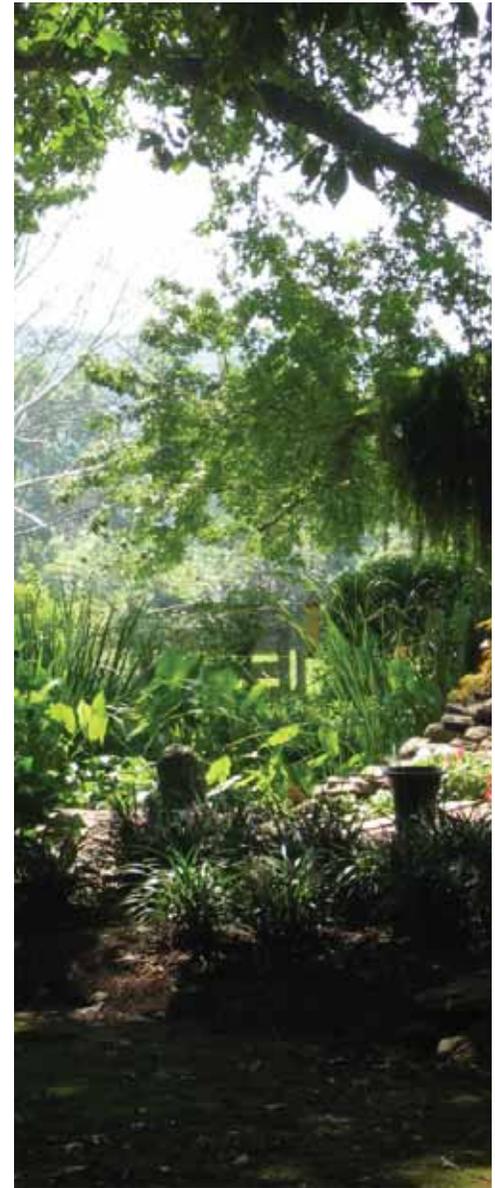
In the flower gardens, amongst the thick patches of Joe-pye weed, coneflower, ironweed and swamp milkweed, you'll find other native plant species that, according to Phyllis, "just showed up and took hold." Many species of moths and butterflies flutter about adding movement, color and invaluable





## The Morway Way

- Compost yard waste to use as fertilizer.
- If an unfamiliar plant appears in the garden, let it grow. You may be pleasantly surprised.
- Learn problem spots and modify when possible.
- Rely on native shrubs and plants whenever possible because they survive better, especially in times of drought or wet conditions.
- Provide food for butterfly larvae (caterpillars) and adults (see list on page 76).
- Goldenrod is not a weed.
- When in drought, use 5-gallon buckets with a half dozen  $\frac{1}{8}$ " holes drilled in the bottom to water trees and shrubs. This allows water to drip slowly just where you want it.
- When aphids are prolific on plants, use a lint roller to dispose of them.



MAGGIE STRUCKER

There are many different environments within the one-acre garden. The shade garden, where at least a half dozen bird feeders reside, includes foamflower, ferns, pachysandra and a few cultivars, including a springtime blanket of violets.