

# Planning Backyard Habitat?

## Try an Animal's Perspective

**T**he first step in planning a backyard wildlife habitat is to assess your property or garden space as it is right now, identifying the habitat elements that already exist for wildlife. Plants that provide food (seeds, fruits, nectar and insects) are important to birds and small mammals. Dense shrubbery, a stand of evergreens or a brush pile will provide cover for many animals and protection from wind and predators.

*Keep an animal's eye view:* Try looking at your habitat from an animal's point of view. Is there a dying tree in the corner of the habitat you were thinking of removing? The knotholes could provide a perfect home for a family of chickadees or a colony of honey bees. Is there a pile of brush that isn't very attractive? It could be tidied up just a bit and continue to provide just the protection a mother rabbit needs to safely bear and raise her young.

*Study your borders:* While making your assessment of habitat elements, take the time to become familiar with the native birds and other animals. Learn which species regularly migrate through the area each year and would benefit from

"temporary room and board" provided along the way.

*What do you want to attract?:* You may be primarily interested in attracting butterflies. Plantings of fragrant, brightly colored flowers in full sunlight — such as butterfly bush, milkweed or cosmos — will attract butterflies.

Perhaps you want to invite birds, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits and frogs to your mini-wildlife refuge. Your planning and planting activities will vary with the habitat area you envision.

All wildlife requires four basic elements: food, water, cover, and areas in which to reproduce and raise young. The widest variety of habitat elements will attract the most birds and animals to your yard.

*Plan for people, too:* Don't forget to plan space for people in your backyard habitat. A wooden bench or mossy-green spot near a small pool or shade tree can be your own private haven to share with wildlife. Children (and adults, too!) love secret spots in the garden where they can hide, think, get away from other people and learn about the natural world in their own way. ❖

*Courtesy of the National Wildlife Federation*