

# Backyard Gardening for Nature

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*“It is increasingly clear that much of our wildlife will not be able to survive unless food, shelter, and nest sites can be found in suburban habitats.” – Douglass Tallamy*

## **EASY WAYS TO ADD LIFE TO YOUR YARD & GARDEN**

Add native plants and trees to your yard. Replacing sod with native plants also sequesters carbon.

Leave some dead trees or branches to provide insect food and cavities for nesting birds.

Create a brush pile and/or stone pile. Both create habitat.

Leave a section of your property messy with weeds, leaf litter and brush. Bugs & birds love it. Can be an area not seen from the street or by neighbors.

Use wood chips as a ground cover instead of dyed mulch. Even wood chips provide habitat.

Start a compost pile, spread compost around your plants in the spring. It provides soil biodiversity.

Apply compost tea to yard instead of fertilizer. This feeds and replenishes “microcritters”.

Stop using chemicals on your lawn and pesticides in your garden. They kill many living things that keep the soil healthy and provide food for other creatures. Pesticides don’t just kill bad bugs; they kill good bugs that help keep the system balanced.

Remove invasive species that crowd out native plants such as garlic mustard, oriental bittersweet, buckthorn, Russian olive, and destructive Japanese Beetles.

## **CHANGE YOUR THINKING**

A healthy ecosystem includes bugs. Bugs eat bugs. Birds eat bugs. Bugs convert plant materials to richer forms of food for others.

Bugs eating your plants are a sign of a healthy system. Bugs are not able to eat many alien plants as easily because they did not evolve with them.

Having some holes in your plants or eaten leaves is OK. The majority of plants can survive without 25% of their foliage.

It is OK to mix native plants with other non-native garden plants. Native does not mean messy.

Some non-native plants also encourage biodiversity such as many herbs. Black Swallowtail caterpillars eat parsley and dill.

Milkweed plants are good. Monarchs depend on them. Include caterpillar host plants in your yard.

Fungi are a sign of a healthy system working. But don’t eat what you don’t know.

## **RECOMMENDED PLANTS**

Meadow Blazingstar – *Liatris ligulistylis*

Ironweed - *Vernonia fasciculata*

Any Milkweed

Any Goldenrod

## **NATIVE PLANT SOURCES**

Friends School Sale, State Fairgrounds

Mother Earth Gardens, Minneapolis

Landscape Alternatives, Shafer

Prairie Restorations, Princeton

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

Bringing Nature Home ~ Douglas W. Tallamy

Landscaping with Native Plants of Minnesota ~ Lynne Steiner

Pollinators of Native Plants ~ Heather Holm

## **WEBSITES**

[restoringthelandscape.com](http://restoringthelandscape.com)

[nature.org/GoNative](http://nature.org/GoNative)

[wildones.org](http://wildones.org)

**Steps to transforming my landscape:**

1. Sketch a map of the whole property.
2. Collect sun/shade info for 9am, 12pm, 3pm, 6pm and add info to copies of the map.
3. Make a list of what I wanted to accomplish in my landscape. I wanted to attract more native songbirds.
4. Make a list and/or collect pictures of what I want to include in my landscape.
5. Hire a landscape designer. Cost \$750-\$1,500 but well worth it.
6. Could have slowly implemented the design myself, but chose to implement with the landscaper over a 3-year period.
7. Manage the site prep myself; it's a lot cheaper that way. Site prep involved digging one rain garden, removing sod, adding decorative rock, and building 6 berms. Was able to do all of this without importing any soil. Hired a college kid to do some of the heavy work.
8. Have landscape designer order and install the plants. Landscapers have access to a lot more varieties than we do.
9. Spread wood chips as ground cover. My tree trimmer gave me free loads of chips.
10. Water new plants 1" per week after planted for a full season and the next spring. A timer is very handy for this, very hard to keep up with otherwise. After established, native plants have a lot deeper root systems and need much less water than sod or non-native plants.
11. Watch everything grow, but pull weeds as I see them.
12. Observe the landscape come to life!

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