

A Little Background...

If your child attends a Galloway public school, he or she may be involved in one of the many school composting or wildlife habitat projects. If so, you may be hearing wonderful stories about the beautiful flowers, butterflies and birds of the school garden.

The School Yard Composting / Habitat project began several years ago as a composting program that taught how vegetable scraps could be turned into a nutrient-rich soil amendment for gardens...but at that time there were very few gardens to be found on our school grounds.

The Habitat portion of the project answered that need. Children can study first-hand the native flowers and plants needed to create “special places” for wildlife to thrive.

This guide will help you to extend these programs into your own back yards...and if your child has been one of those fortunate enough to have taken part in the school program, he or she will be able to give you EXPERT advice !



What is Composting?

Composting is the natural decomposition process during which organic materials (kitchen scraps, grass and leaves break down and create a nutrient-rich soil amendment called humus.

Why Compost?

Home composting allows you to manage your yard waste on your own property by turning it into a useful end product. It is also an effective way to reduce the amount of trash that you put at the curb. The kitchen scraps that you would normally throw away can be combined with your leaves and other yard debris to be used as natural fertilizer for your new wildlife garden.

How to Arrange Your Bin or Pile

For maximum efficiency, you should always have an equal amount of “green” (nitrogen) material; and “brown” (carbon) material.

Greens (examples)

Vegetable Scraps
Citrus Rinds
Grass Clippings

Browns (examples)

Leaves
Bark
Peanut Shells

Add: Air and water. Rainwater may be sufficient; occasionally, however, you may have to add extra water. Air is extremely important in order to keep odors down and encourage the “right” kind of microorganisms to work at decomposing your materials. Adding air is easy...simply turn the pile with a shovel, or you can even poke holes through the pile with a pole.

A FAMILY GUIDE TO COMPOSTING AND CREATING A BACKYARD WILDLIFE HABITAT



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Your Home Wildlife Habitat...

The creation of a backyard wildlife habitat at your home will provide homes for various wildlife including birds, small animals, butterflies, honeybees, etc.; and provide a great learning experience for the whole family.

Habitat is...

Food, including seeds, berries, flower nectar, nuts, and insects;

Water; which can be provided by of birdbaths, a pond, misting, puddles or rain;

Cover; (Protection) Trees, shrubs, brush piles, logs or bird houses.

Tips for Success..

Before beginning the project, break it into small steps. Develop goals that are realistic yet challenging. Encourage your child to participate. Think about the type of wildlife that you would be comfortable welcoming into your yard and choose native plants accordingly. Keep in mind what your site will support; i.e.; sun-loving plants will not thrive in a moist, shaded yard. Remember: plants that originated in our area are the most likely to succeed and will provide food to wildlife that already exists in and around your yard.

Preferred Feeding Levels for Birds...

To attract a variety of birds to your yard, you need to provide food at different levels:

Ground feeders:	Mourning doves, juncos, sparrows, & towhees
Table level feeders:	Cardinals, finches, jays & sparrows
Hanging feeders:	Titmice & goldfinches
Tree (suet) feeders:	Woodpeckers, nuthatches & wrens

Bird Nesting Boxes...

Wildlife that use nesting boxes find their natural homes in the holes and hollows of dead and decaying trees. Providing artificial homes can bring certain species of birds and other wildlife into your habitat. A little research is needed to build or purchase boxes for specific species; take into consideration the placement of the box, the size of the hole, etc.

Butterfly & Container Gardens

If you are working with a small site or simply prefer to use a small space, you can still attract butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, and orioles to a container garden. Wooden barrels, boxes made from recycled railroad ties, and window boxes can all be used for container gardens. Native wildflowers provide food for caterpillars and nectar for birds and butterflies. The seeds that are produced are also a source of winter food for numerous bird species. Wildflowers that can attract wildlife are milkweed, asters, phlox, black and brown-eyed susan, white or purple bergamot, cardinal flowers, and goldenrods. Herbs make great companion plants for these flowers; as they are valuable food source for larvae.

Also...

 Avoid the use of pesticides & herbicides in order to ensure safe areas for yourself, the family pets, and the wildlife that you are inviting to your yard.

 Try a bat house in your Yard. A bat can eat six hundred mosquitoes in an hour!

 A brush pile, especially when placed near feeder, offers cover for not only birds, but insects, squirrels, chipmunks, snakes and turtles.

 If you have a large, cleared yard, think about letting a portion of it go "back to nature". Native plants and shrubs will thrive in your new meadow; and wildlife will abound.

