

To Attract Wildlife...

Imitate Nature



Want to entice wildlife, turn your yard, local schoolyard or a community area into a nature preserve and discover the joy of peaceful observation? The best way to do this is to imitate nature. You'll encourage wildlife to stop in by providing food, water, and cover. Include a safe place to raise young and you'll encourage wildlife to stay longer, perhaps all year.

Before you begin, become familiar with birds, butterflies, bees, bats, squirrels, raccoons, toads, mice, rabbits, insects and any other wildlife residing in your area. Learn which species migrate through your region and would benefit from "temporary accommodations" in your yard. (*What's Wild*-PW, p 7; *Wildlife Is Everywhere*-PW, p 49; *Urban Nature Search*-PW, p 70. For habitat improvement projects use... *Can Do*-PW, p 453, and *Improving Wildlife Habitat in the Community*-PW, p 447.)

When creating an inviting wildlife habitat here are some important considerations:

Food

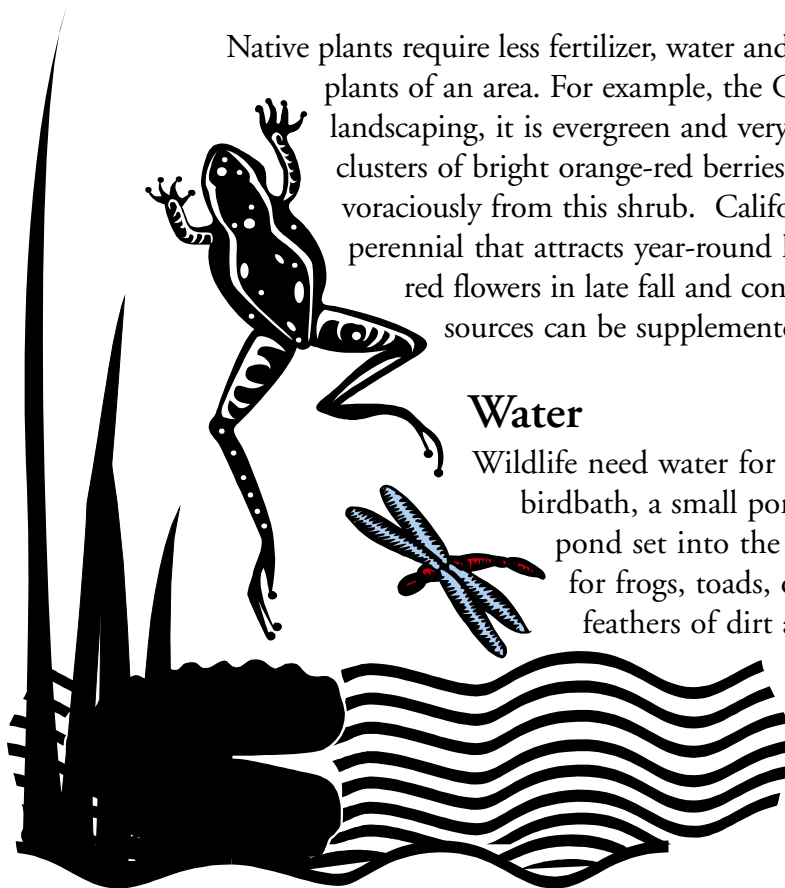
Combine plants that appeal to the widest range of wildlife species. Songbirds flock to fruit in any season, while butterflies, bees and hummingbirds are drawn to flowers rich in sweet nectar. (*Environmental Barometer*-PW, p 80; *Learning to Look, Looking to See*-PW, p 280)

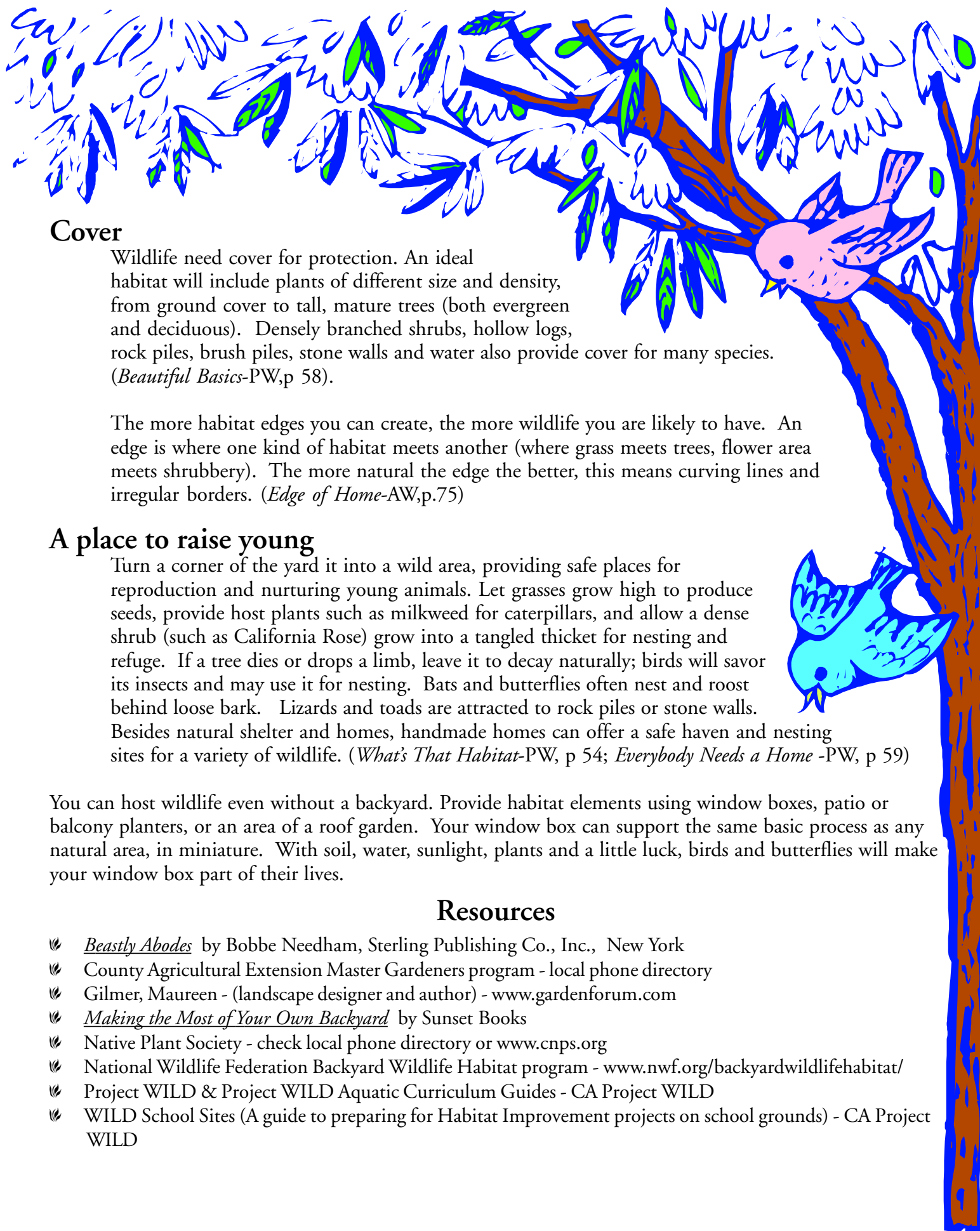
Birds, bats and toads are nature's best pest control mechanism. They are natural insect zappers that consume plant-damaging caterpillars, grasshoppers, mosquitos, moths, stinkbugs, cucumber beetles and other pests. (*Career Critters*-PW, p 371)

Native plants require less fertilizer, water and pest control, plus wildlife thrive best on the native plants of an area. For example, the Christmas berry (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is great for landscaping, it is evergreen and very adaptable to garden conditions. It produces huge clusters of bright orange-red berries during the holidays. Robins that over-winter will feed voraciously from this shrub. California fuchsia (*Zauschneria californica*) is a native perennial that attracts year-round hummingbirds. This low spreading plant bears bright red flowers in late fall and continues into winter. During winter months natural food sources can be supplemented by bird feeders. (*World Travelers* P.W. p 334)

Water

Wildlife need water for drinking and bathing, which can be supplied in a birdbath, a small pond, a recirculating waterfall or a shallow dish. A small pond set into the ground can also provide cover and reproduction areas for frogs, toads, other amphibians and insects. Birds bath to free their feathers of dirt and oils and leave space between them for pockets of trapped air. Be sure to keep bird baths clean and replace water regularly. Butterflies can't drink from open water, they need puddles or damp spots of wet sand or dirt. (*Blue Ribbon Niche*-AW,p 52)





Cover

Wildlife need cover for protection. An ideal habitat will include plants of different size and density, from ground cover to tall, mature trees (both evergreen and deciduous). Densely branched shrubs, hollow logs, rock piles, brush piles, stone walls and water also provide cover for many species. (*Beautiful Basics*-PW,p 58).

The more habitat edges you can create, the more wildlife you are likely to have. An edge is where one kind of habitat meets another (where grass meets trees, flower area meets shrubbery). The more natural the edge the better, this means curving lines and irregular borders. (*Edge of Home*-AW,p.75)

A place to raise young

Turn a corner of the yard it into a wild area, providing safe places for reproduction and nurturing young animals. Let grasses grow high to produce seeds, provide host plants such as milkweed for caterpillars, and allow a dense shrub (such as California Rose) grow into a tangled thicket for nesting and refuge. If a tree dies or drops a limb, leave it to decay naturally; birds will savor its insects and may use it for nesting. Bats and butterflies often nest and roost behind loose bark. Lizards and toads are attracted to rock piles or stone walls. Besides natural shelter and homes, handmade homes can offer a safe haven and nesting sites for a variety of wildlife. (*What's That Habitat*-PW, p 54; *Everybody Needs a Home* -PW, p 59)

You can host wildlife even without a backyard. Provide habitat elements using window boxes, patio or balcony planters, or an area of a roof garden. Your window box can support the same basic process as any natural area, in miniature. With soil, water, sunlight, plants and a little luck, birds and butterflies will make your window box part of their lives.

Resources

- ☛ *Beastly Abodes* by Bobbe Needham, Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., New York
- ☛ County Agricultural Extension Master Gardeners program - local phone directory
- ☛ Gilmer, Maureen - (landscape designer and author) - www.gardenforum.com
- ☛ *Making the Most of Your Own Backyard* by Sunset Books
- ☛ Native Plant Society - check local phone directory or www.cnps.org
- ☛ National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat program - www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/
- ☛ Project WILD & Project WILD Aquatic Curriculum Guides - CA Project WILD
- ☛ WILD School Sites (A guide to preparing for Habitat Improvement projects on school grounds) - CA Project WILD