

Landscaping 3 to 4 Acres For Wildlife



What a joy it is to live in a home with some surrounding acreage – it gives you countless choices for landscaping. Sometimes, however, so many choices can be overwhelming and leave you wondering where to start.

One way to narrow your focus is to decide to enhance your landscape for wildlife.

Before you begin, think about the four basic needs of wildlife: food, water, cover, and space. Study the existing features of your land and see what needs are already being met, then decide what you would like to add.

A sketch of your property will be a big help, and so will notes about soil conditions, average rainfall, amount of sunlight, wind direction, and climate zone.

Remember that you don't have to do everything at once. A budget and a timetable will help you put your plans in perspective and prioritize your improvements.

The library, your local Cooperative Extension office, bookstores, nurseries, and the WindStar Wildlife Institute can all provide information on what plants will do well in your area and what wildlife you can expect to attract.

With 3 to 4 acres, the size of property around which our sample landscape is designed, you may feel that you already have plenty of "space." This term means something different to wildlife than it does to people, however.

For wild creatures, their space has to include sufficient food, water, cover, and safe places to raise a family.

The required range varies from species to species. Voles thrive when there are as many

as 35 per acre, but even one family of foxes would feel crowded in an area that size.

Be Different

One of the best ways to enhance property for wildlife is to offer as much diversity as possible. When choosing plants, strive for a variety of heights, bloom times, food value (seeds, nuts, fruit, twigs), growth habits (dense, open), evergreen and deciduous leaves.

The more choices you offer, the more species you are likely to attract. Getting your neighbors interested in enhancing their properties at the same time will increase the range available for larger animals and offer additional resources.

Go Native

WindStar emphasizes “native” plants because they have evolved with wildlife to become highly suited to its needs. They are also hardier, requiring fewer chemicals to keep them healthy. At the same time, there are many nonnative species that may attract your interest, and your final design should reflect your own taste and preferences.

We recommend, however, that you do some research first. “Exotic” plants may become invasive and can get out of control more easily when you have a large property to supervise. Once established, they are very difficult to eliminate.

Groups of plants are generally more attractive to wildlife than single specimens, and with a large property you have the opportunity to landscape with clusters of vegetation.

Evergreen windbreaks are a good example. Planted in masses, these trees are striking in appearance throughout the year, and offer valuable winter cover for wildlife, as well as seeds for birds.

As an extra bonus, they can indeed block cold winds. Shown in the sample plan are groupings of Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), white pine (*Pinus strobus*), and red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).

For the unspecified evergreen screen near the house, consider broadleaf evergreens like American holly (*Ilex opaca*), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), or Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*).

Reduce Spraying

Trees for the fruit orchard can be chosen to suit your taste buds, but select cultivars that have been bred to require as little chemical treatment as possible. Sprays can affect birds and beneficial insects, as well as those that you are trying to eliminate.

Deciduous trees will lose their leaves in winter, but provide food, flowers, nesting sites in spring, and shady relief from the summer sun.

Keep in mind the mature size of any selection, and whether it will block a view or crowd a structure.

Shrubs Produce Berries

There are also many kinds of shrubs to choose from, providing a lower layer of vegetation. Those in our chart are native plants selected for their wildlife value. Most produce berries, some of which will persist into winter to supply important cold-weather nourishment.

With some acreage to work with, you have the chance to set aside large areas for the meadows that wildlife appreciates so much but has less and less opportunity to find. Whether filled with flowers or grasses, meadows offer plenty of cover and food. There are wildflower seed mixes available for all parts of the country, and a variety of grains and warm season grasses to choose from.

Our design uses switchgrass, millet, grain sorghum, clover, and buckwheat. Warm season grass selections can include little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), and Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis humenoides*).

Songbirds Love Sunflowers

The areas set aside to be planted with sunflowers will lift your spirits every time you see them in bloom, and delight

songbirds of all kinds as the seeds ripen on the flower heads.

You may have noticed that while there is an area of lawn included around the house, it represents only a small portion of the property.

Mowed grass is nice for people to walk on, but offers almost no value to wildlife. In addition, more lawn means more work, expense, and use of

chemicals, so it is in your own interest to limit its size.

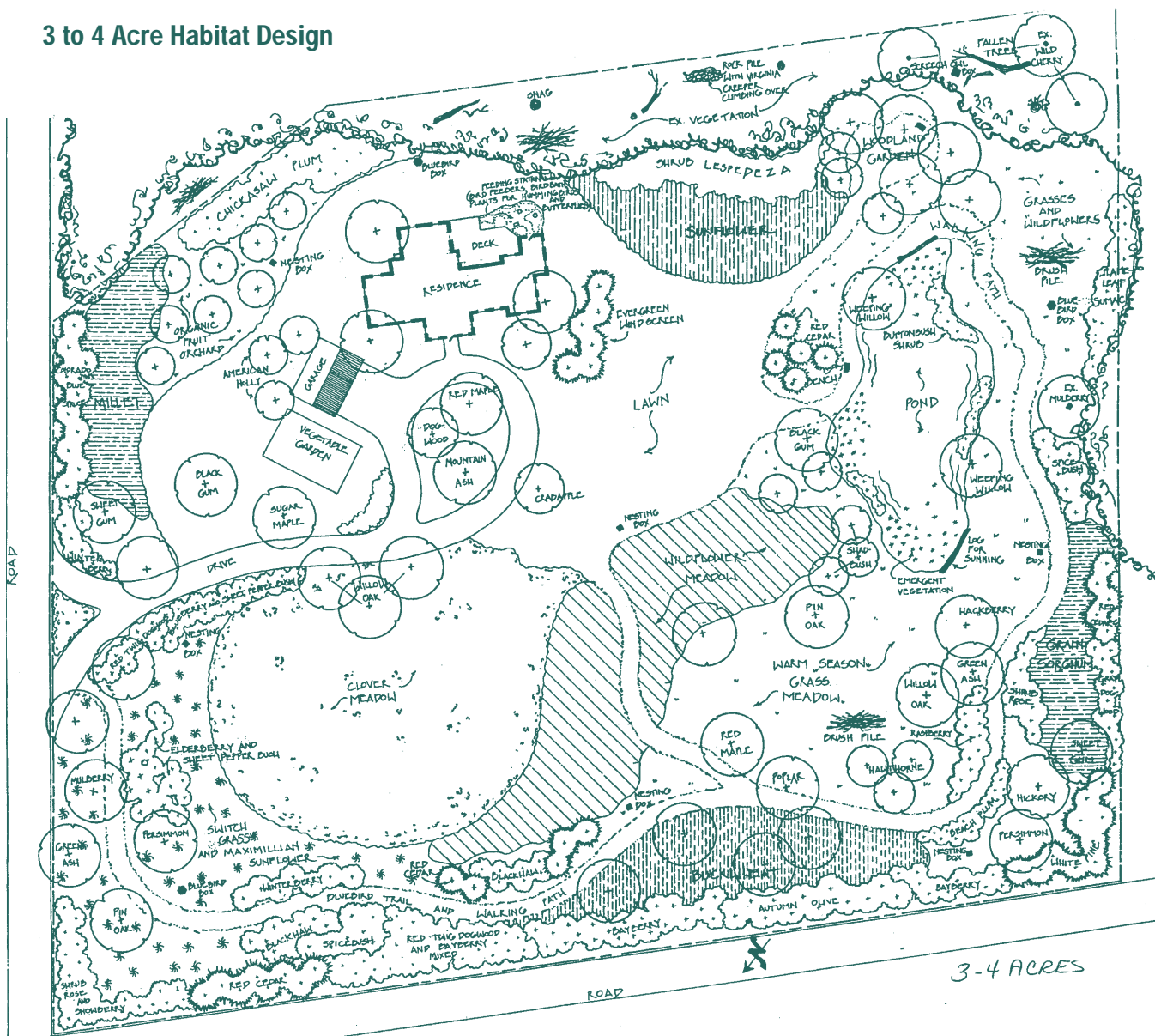
Ground covers can be good alternatives to traditional lawn. Some choices to consider are juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*), cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*), and periwinkles (*Vinca major/minor*).

Water is necessary for all living things, and a pond is a wonderful way to provide it.

The extra size and depth mean that it won't freeze as quickly as a birdbath, and because it is at ground level, it can benefit many different species. You can add fish and a selection of water plants, and should include some rocks or logs for sunning and perching.

There are many pond-making kits on the market, as well as books on how to build one yourself.

3 to 4 Acre Habitat Design



A birdbath near feeding areas will attract even birds that don't eat seeds, and moving water (a drip, waterfall, or fountain) is especially appealing.

Be sure that any bath is no more than 3" deep and includes a safe place to perch.

Add a Brush Pile

Rock piles, fallen logs, brush piles, and dead trees (snags) – these are not features that first come to mind when planning a landscape.

In nature, however, these are valuable resources for wildlife.

Too often people tidy up their yards and remove them. Kept in areas away from the house behind attractive vegetation, or covered with a vine such as Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), they will attract many small wildlife species.

Nature Trails

Paths will let you explore your wildlife habitat more enjoyably, and make it easy to incorporate a bluebird trail. The number of bluebirds had declined dramatically before people stepped in with nesting boxes to replace tree cavities that were lost to increasing development.

Because bluebirds are often displaced by more aggressive birds, the trail lets you monitor the boxes and take action against any predators.

Bluebirds are territorial, so the houses should be placed at least 100 yards apart.

Build a Nest

There are other birds that will gratefully nest in man-made houses (nesting boxes), but different species have different nesting requirements. Choose

or build nesting boxes designed for specific kinds of birds, and mount them appropriately.

Those that birds prefer are simple in design and muted in color. Always place houses, feeders, or birdbaths within 5' to 15' of a tree or shrub to allow escape from predators.

Recommended Plants

Evergreen Trees	Scientific Name	Height	Landscape and Wildlife Value
American holly	<i>Ilex opaca</i>	tall: 40'	berries
Eastern hemlock	<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	tall: 40'-70'	seeds, twigs
Eastern red cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	tall: 30'-50'	berries
Eastern white pine	<i>Pinus strobus</i>	tall: 80'	seeds, sap, cover, fast growing
Sweetbay magnolia	<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>	medium: 15'-30'	seeds, twigs
Virginia pine	<i>Pinus virginiana</i>	tall: 50'-80'	seeds, twigs

Deciduous Trees	Scientific Name	Height	Landscape and Wildlife Value
Autumn olive	<i>Osmanthus americanus</i>	medium: 30'	flowers, berries
Beach plum	<i>Prunus americana</i>	medium: 30'	flowers, fruit
Beech	<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>	tall: 50'-100'	nuts, sap, buds
Bitternut hickory	<i>Carya cordiformis</i>	tall: 40'-60'	fall color, nuts, sap
Black gum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	tall: 30'-60'	fall color, fruit
Crab apple	<i>Malus angustifolia</i>	medium: 30'	flowers, fruit
Dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>	medium: 15'-30'	flowers, fall color, berries, twigs
Green ash	<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	tall: 50'-60'	fall color, seeds, fast growing
Hackberry	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	tall: 40'-60'	fruit, twigs
Mountain ash	<i>Sorbus americana</i>	medium: 30'	berries
Mulberry	<i>Morus rubra</i>	tall: 60'	berries
Persimmon	<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	tall: 35'-60'	fruit
Pin oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>	tall: 60'-80'	fall color, acorns
Red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	tall: 60'-90'	fall color, seeds, sap
River birch	<i>Betula nigra</i>	tall: 30'-50'	fruit, sap, buds, peeling bark
Shadbush	<i>Amelanchier arvoreae</i>	medium: 15'-30'	berries, twigs
Sugar maple	<i>Acer saccharum</i>	tall: 70'-100'	fall color, sap, seeds
Sweet gum	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	tall: 60'-100'	fall color, seeds
Weeping willow	<i>Salix babylonica</i>	tall: 30'-40'	(nonnative) fruit, twigs
Wild cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	tall: 80'	fruit, sap
Willow oak	<i>Quercus phellos</i>	tall: 50'-80'	acorns

Shrubs	Scientific Name	Height	Landscape and Wildlife Value
Bayberry	<i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>	5'-12'	berries
Blackberries	<i>Rubus fruticosas</i>	3'-6'	berries
Buttonbush	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	3'-6'	nectar, seeds
Chickasaw plum	<i>Prunus angustifolia</i>	5'-15'	fruit
Elderberry	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	5'-12'	flowers, berries, nectar
Flame leaf sumac	<i>Rhus copallina</i>	10'-25'	fall color, seeds
Gray dogwood	<i>Cornus racemosa</i>	10'-15'	flowers, berries, twigs
Rasberries	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	2'-5'	berries
Red twig dogwood	<i>Cornus alba Siberica</i>	6'	berries, winter color
Shrub rose	<i>Rosa palustris</i>	5'-8'	flowers, berries
Snowberry	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	1'-4'	berries
Spicebush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	6'-12'	berries
Sweet pepper bush	<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>	9'	flowers, nectar
Winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	5'-10'	berries, winter color

Many people already enjoy maintaining bird feeders, and a designated area near the house lets you watch the activity and keep the feeders easily filled. Mimicking nature, feeders should be placed at different heights.

Overall, black oil sunflower seed is the most popular with

birds, but there are many selections of seeds and nectars available.

There are specific plants (see list below) for butterfly and hummingbird gardens and your local nursery and mail order catalogues can provide a seemingly endless array of choices.

Flowers for Hummingbirds and Butterflies

Bee Balm	Monarda didyma
Butterfly bush	Buddleia
Butterfly weed	Asclepias tuberosa
Cardinal flower	Lobelia cardinalis
Coral honeysuckle	Lonicera sempervirens
Cosmos	Cosmos sulphureous
Cross vine	Bignonia capreolata
Joe-Pye weed	Eupatorium spp.
Lantana	Lantana camara
Pentas	Pentas lanceolata
Purple coneflower	Echinacea purpurea
Scarlet sage	Salvia coccinea

Native Plants for a Shady Garden

Alumroot	Heuchera americana
Bellflower	Campanula rotundifolia
Bleeding heart	Dicentra eximia
Bugbane	Cimicifuga racemosa
Goatsbeard	Aruncus dioicus
Jack-in-the-Pulpit	Arisaema triphyllum
Oakleaf hydrangea	Hydrangea quercifolia
Sweet shrub	Calycanthus floridus
Strawberry bush	Euonymus americanus
Turtlehead	Chelone glabra
Violet	Viola spp.
White wood aster	Aster divaricatus
Wild indigo	Baptisa australis



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WindStar Wildlife Institute is a national, non-profit, conservation organization whose mission is to help individuals and families establish or improve the wildlife habitat on their properties.