

# Start Your Sustainable Dream Yard



**What does your dream yard look like?** It's time to start planning what is needed to create *your* dream yard. If you want to sustain our planet's environment, your landscape planting design and needs are the same as those for a traditional yard: style (English garden, Country garden, etc.), an organized look ("curb appeal") and the proper tools (trowels, weed digger, shovels, gloves, etc.). To appeal to the eye of the general public, place lower, flowering plants in front. Start your garden small so it's easy to manage. Keep plants out of the way of overhead lines and utility boxes, plant wet-footed plants in low areas and place your garden where you can see and enjoy it.

My dream yard supports everything from native butterflies, hummingbirds and songbirds down to the tiny, beneficial nematodes in my soil with the plants they need to survive. I want to create a healthy yard for wildlife, me and my community.

## **How can our yards help sustain our planet?**

1. **Garden Pest Control** - Native insects ("bugs") are a critical food source. They are rich in protein for wildlife (especially for native songbirds and hummingbirds), so stop chemical use to keep insects alive and well. Native insects attract beneficial, predatory insects, like ladybugs and spined soldier bugs.
2. **Lawn Maintenance** - Apply corn gluten early spring and late summer (mid-March to mid-April and mid-August to mid-Sept. in the Ohio region) for pre-emergent, broad-leaf weed control and as a natural fertilizer. Some organic insecticides are toxic to bees. See them in the table on page 2 at <https://xerces.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/19->

[005\\_01\\_Organic-Approved-Pesticides\\_Overview-FS\\_web.pdf](#). Note that corn gluten is in green. Over-seeding also helps squeeze out weeds.

3. **Native Plants** - Add plants native to your region to provide natural wildlife food, including insects, nuts, berries, etc. Find a native plant vendor who can guide you to purchase plants that are pure native and the most helpful to wildlife (not a cultivar or hybrid). You can get a list online <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/Plants>. After three years, I gradually stopped watering the garden because native plants grow deep tap roots. Most native plants placed in the right location go dormant rather than dying from drought. I water if it is a prolonged drought.
4. **Invasive Plants** - Avoid plants invasive to our areas by checking state invasive plant lists <https://plants.usda.gov/java/noxiousDriver>.
5. **More Tips** - Follow the tips on the *Environmentally Friendly Lawn and Garden Care* flier on the *How Do I Do This* tab on my website [www.backyardhabitat.info](http://www.backyardhabitat.info). To keep in the loop, sign up for the monthly *Nature Scoop* email (which contains timely tips for your yard and garden) on the *Home* tab.

## **Which native plants are the most helpful?**

The top native trees to support our environment are those that support the largest number of caterpillar species: Red or White Oak (*Quercus*) supports 534 species (you can start an Oak by planting an acorn), Cherry/Plum (*Prunus*) supports 456 species (Wild Black Cherry is beautiful) and Willow (*Salix*) also supports 456 species. This and more helpful information is in Douglas Tallamy's book called *Bringing Nature Home (Updated and Expanded)*.

I also want flowers to support insects that pollinate the plants, so I choose those on which native butterflies and moths lay their eggs, drink nectar and find shelter. For starters, see *Attract Butterflies to your Yard* and *Butterfly Quick Start* on the *How Do I Do This* tab at [www.backyardhabitat.info](http://www.backyardhabitat.info).

To certify your yard with National Wildlife Federation and to let others know what you are doing, click on [www.nwf.org/certify](http://www.nwf.org/certify).

- Toni Stahl, Habitat Ambassador