

#5: Attract Wildlife

BRING YOUR YARD TO LIFE BY PROVIDING WATER, FOOD, AND SHELTER FOR BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, AND OTHER CREATURES



Remember to plant for pollinators.



Firebush supplies food for birds and butterflies.

Florida is a state renowned for its diverse and unique ecosystems. But rapid development, particularly in coastal areas, is continuing to destroy wildlife habitat. As our communities expand, we rightly lament the loss of native birds and other animals. But did you know there is much you can do at home to create a safe haven for these displaced Floridians?

By following the simple tips in this chapter, your Florida-Friendly lawn and garden can become a sanctuary for wildlife, as well as part of a migratory passage between one wild space and another. Animals need to move from place to place, just like people. They have trouble traveling in heavily urban and suburban landscapes, but you can help them by joining your Florida-Friendly yard with others in the neighborhood to create a “natural corridor”—a safe, traversable route between woodlands, wetlands, or other wild areas.

Use a variety of plants in your yard’s design to attract many different species of animals, from birds and butterflies to snakes and squirrels. Your home landscape will become a refuge for critters in need of shade, rest, food, and water. In return, your landscape will become a living, lovely part of Florida. Talk with your neighbors and community organizations about Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, and encourage others to make their yards as hospitable as yours.

TIPS

Try a few of these ideas to lure wildlife to your yard:

- **Provide food.** Select plants with seeds, fruit, foliage, or flowers that butterflies, birds, and other wildlife like to eat. Berries, fleshy fruits, nuts, and acorns are all treats for many animals.

- **Supply water.** Any water you provide will attract wildlife. You could have running water in the form of a natural feature, such as a pond, creek, or other body of fresh water, but a fountain or birdbath will also beckon wildlife. Empty and clean your birdbath every few days. Do not clean it with soap or bleach—just physically scrub all surfaces with a brush or scouring-type sponge. Change the water regularly to prevent mosquito breeding and bacterial contamination.
- **Leave snags.** Leave snags, which are the trunks of dead trees, in place if they do not create a hazard. Many birds use snags for perching, nesting, and feeding.



Snags have great appeal for various woodpeckers.

- **Manage pets.** If you permit pets to harass or kill wildlife, you will only hinder any efforts you make toward attracting wildlife. This is especially true for cats allowed outdoors, so keep your cats inside.

- **Reduce insecticide use.** Each time you apply an insecticide to your landscape, you reduce insect populations, which form an important food source for birds. Some chemicals can also poison birds and other animals that feed on affected insects.
- **Reduce the amount of mowed lawn area.** Unmowed areas can contain more plant species than mowed areas, providing more potential food sources and habitat for wildlife. Reduce the mowed area around your house, especially in low-traffic areas, such as corners of the yard.
- **Increase vertical layering.** Plant a variety of plants in different sizes and heights to provide more cover and feeding opportunities for diverse species of wildlife.



Layers of vegetation entice wildlife and add visual interest.

CREATURE COMFORTS

To attract specific types of animals or insects to your yard, think about their needs.

BATS

A small bat house in your yard can provide a roost for bats. An individual bat can eat thousands of insects in a night, and



A bat house provides a roost for these nocturnal pollinators.

bats also serve as important pollinators for many flowering plants, including fruit trees. Bat houses aren't complex structures, and designs are easy to find in books and on the Internet. Your bat house should be tall, shallow, and hung at least twelve to fifteen feet above the ground on the south or southeast side of a tree, pole, or building. The site should be fairly open and easy for bats to see.

BIRDS

Design planted areas that include a tree canopy, smaller understory trees and shrubs, grasses, and flowers. Allow grasses and flowers to go to seed on occasion—this is a real draw for birds.

BUTTERFLIES

A combination of both larval (caterpillar) and nectar plants will attract a variety of butterflies to your yard. Nectar plants provide food for adult butterflies, while larval plants are food sources for the caterpillar stage. If you want to attract butterflies to your yard, expect a certain level of damage to certain plants from hungry caterpillars. See the plant list online at <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu> for help with choosing species that attract butterflies.