

**HELP BRING NATURE BACK HOME:
7 STEPS YOU CAN TAKE IN YOUR OWN YARD TO RESTORE WILDLIFE HABITAT**

Humans have greatly altered the natural environment, and as a result, the web of life has been thrown severely out of balance in most places. As a consequence, wildlife at every level is being negatively affected. Many species are in severe decline such as native birds and pollinators. But you can make a difference starting in your own yard. Here are seven steps that everyone can take to help bring nature back home.

- **GROW NATIVE TREES, SHRUBS, VINES, GRASSES, and PERENNIAL FLOWERS**

Our local vegetation co-evolved with insects, birds, and other animals to create complex food webs. Non-native plants we've introduced disrupt and fail to support this complex ecosystem on which all wildlife depends. Check out link for more information on [native plants for the Piedmont area of North Carolina](#).

- **ELIMINATE INVASIVE PLANTS**

Some of the non-native plants have become "invasive" by outcompeting local vegetation and severely disrupting natural ecosystems. Examples that you will see everywhere you walk in the woods include Stiltgrass and Privet. Use this link or more information about [invasive plants and how to control them](#).

- **REDUCE LAWN AREA**

Lawns with a purpose such as a place for children to play make sense. However, large lawns with no purpose other than to demonstrate one's wealth historically became the norm. Lawns do not support wildlife, and the fertilizers and insecticides needed to keep them healthy are damaging the environment. Also the frequent mowing needed to maintain them contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

- **MULCH WITH LEAVES**

Leaves, when they fall from your trees and other plants, are nature's way of fertilizing and mulching the vegetation in your yard. Mature habitats can be self sustaining if leaves are left where they fall. Worms, many insects and insect larvae rely on leaf litter and decaying vegetation for their habitat and food source and in turn feed birds and other animals. This "ground layer" of a natural ecosystem is perhaps one of the most important but often the most neglected. If the leaves are too coarse, run over them a few times with a lawn mower or compost them.

- **MINIMIZE OR ELIMINATE USE OF HERBICIDES, PESTICIDES, AND RODENTICIDES**

Pesticides are indiscriminate in that they kill both their intended target along with beneficial organisms and insects, and they can be dangerous to humans and wildlife. Most rodenticides kill rodents by causing them to bleed to death, but that death can be slow and painful, and predators such as hawks will eat them and then suffer the same fate of slowly bleeding to death. Persistent and widespread use of herbicides can be harmful to humans and wildlife and collect in runoff to streams. In spite of claims by manufacturers, there is no completely safe herbicide.

- **MINIMIZE USE OF NON-ORGANIC FERTILIZERS**

Healthy garden soil with leaf mulch needs little or no fertilizing. But if you have to use fertilizers, organic fertilizers are much preferable. In contrast to non-organics, they release nutrients slowly preventing runoff of chemicals that damage streams and lakes, and they build the soil and nourish micro-organisms that are vital to soil health.

- **CREATE HOMES FOR WILDLIFE**

When we cut down dead trees, remove fallen ones, and eliminate brush piles, we eliminate what would have been homes for native wildlife. By leaving some of these, if not a safety issue, you can restore their homes. You can also create substitute homes by putting up functional (as opposed to decorative) bird houses, putting up bat houses, and even [creating habitat for native bees](#) and other pollinators to nest.

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