WILDLIFE IN A HOME LANDSCAPE

Spring is a time for home shows. Shoppers and dreamers wander around town looking at the latest in home designs, furnishings and high-tech features. Many animals are also home shopping, looking for places to live and raise a family.

You may be looking for a larger kitchen and more bed-rooms or space for hobbies. Maybe you have found a great location near work and shopping. Wildlife has the same basic needs for shelter, food and space - just on a different scale.

As our county population continues to increase, it becomes even more important that we consider the impact of growth on the wild things around us. Animals have very specific needs and often have a difficult time adapting. Some species cannot survive if trans- planted to a less populated area for our convenience.

Subdivisions and roads fracture natural communities destroying wildlife homes, food supplies, family systems and travel corridors. Our growth must continue, but fortunately, we can re-create or enhance our yards and developments to allow some species to co-exist with our new homes.

Planners and land designers are beginning to consider wildlife in their communities. Large natural areas are important for large species such as bears and panthers, but smaller connected corridors are important for smaller species. instead of leaving a wild natural buffer only at the edge of development, it is important to plan ribbons of natural vegetation and waterways through neighborhoods and make natural connections to adjacent property.

The larger the project, the more flexibility in design. Several local projects, including Harmony and Soli Vita, are integrating wildlife needs with human needs.

On a smaller scale, individuals can make enhancements in their own yards. Remember food, shelter and space? Here are some hints.

Animals need places for sleeping and nesting. Birdhouses are often functional additions to our garden. They are most effective for birds that naturally nest in tree hollows. Different species require different conditions and many birds do not use enclosed nests.

You can add a more natural birdhouse by leaving a standing snag or dead tree if you have one, or you can import a tree trunk from a tree service and let it rot. If a tree dies in your yard, consider removing the top above 10' and cut off the limbs leaving stubs for perches. As insects and other decomposers naturally destroy the bark, many birds will visit for food or a place to rest. Soon you may notice flickers, kestrels, owls or other cavity-nesting birds take up residence.

Many animals such as toads and lizards need burrows in the ground to survive. You can create burrows from predrilled plastic perforated drain pipe. Lay the pipe, with the holes down, in a trench about 3' deep in the middle and gradually sloping up to the surface. You will be able to peek in each end with a flashlight to observe the inhabitants periodically. Don't disturb the residents too often or they will move out.

Ponds are important to wildlife in urban areas. Ponds provide water for drinking, bathing, living and reproducing. Frogs and salamanders lay eggs in standing water. Fish in ponds can be entertaining as well as wildlife food. Butterflies drink water from wet sandy areas, such as at the edge of the ponds. Birds and other animals bathe in shallow water. Be sure the pond includes different depths for a variety of needs.

Ponds don't have to be too large or elaborate. Even a 3' ready-made pond from a home improvement store...
will provide benefits for our wild neighbors.

Tree frogs eat lots of pesky insects. Encourage them with easy-to-make tree frog houses to keep them from dehydrating in a new sunny landscape. Use a scrap piece of PVC pipe, 1½” in diameter and 2’ to 3’ long, and insert it upright into the ground. Place it in a shady spot. You can paint the outside to camouflage it in the landscape, but the frogs don't really care.

Building houses for wildlife does not guarantee that you will have new residents, but they won't move in if they do not have the necessary ingredients.

"Location, location, location," as we hear in real estate marketing, is so important for wildlife, too. They were here before we were. Maybe we can invite them to move back.

As you look around your landscape and consider your housing needs, maybe you can also enhance a home for wildlife. The Osceola County Extension office has a variety of free publications to help you encourage wildlife in your neighborhood. The new book, *Landscaping for Florida's Wildlife: Re-creating Native Ecosystems in Your Yard* is available at the office for $16. Contact the Master Gardeners on Mondays to Fridays from 10 am to 2 pm at (321) 697-3000. You can reach them at the Web page epabon5@ufl.edu.

Check out the following web sites for more information on Landscaping for Wildlife.

**Backyard Wildlife Habitat**

**Florida Wildlife Extension**

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