Our Changing Landscape

Here in Virginia, our beautiful landscape holds a rich variety of terrain, native plants and wildlife. But our rural landscape is changing as forests are cleared, habitat is destroyed and farms disappear. We as individual landowners hold the keys to preserving and protecting the natural beauty of Virginia’s countryside—for ourselves, our children and future generations.

How can I make a difference?

Changes we make now in our home landscaping can benefit all of us—and wildlife.

- Maintain “wild” areas—the more the better: woodlands, wetlands, and thickets help nature survive.
- Blend homes into the landscape—consider natural contours when building.
- Plant less lawn and more “natural green” areas: a meadow of grasses and flowers, clusters of trees and shrubs, a butterfly garden.
- Make a place for wildlife—plant native trees, shrubs and plants.
- Avoid pesticides and herbicides—keep our water, air, and land poison-free.

Why Choose Native Plants?

Native plants are part of the natural growth here in Virginia; they make our landscape beautiful and provide habitat for wildlife.

Native Plants survive and thrive.

- They’re well-adapted to the soil and climate here.
- Hardy and drought-resistant, they need less care.
- They have attractive natural shapes.
- They offer the best food, shelter and nest sites for wildlife.

“Right plant, right place”: Our natural countryside has a variety of very different areas—rocky hillsides, shady woodlands, meadows, wetlands: choose the right plant for your site. VNPS offers a list of native plants for habitats.

Save a Place for Wildlife

Do you thrill to the sight of a hawk soaring overhead? Enjoy seeing wild turkeys in a field or a heron standing in a stream? Would you like your children to grow up seeing a cardinal feeding a nest of hungry baby birds, hummingbirds and butterflies at your doorstep? Wildlife needs our help to survive:

As forests are destroyed and housing replaces open land, our local wildlife is losing ground—literally. Mowed lawn and a few isolated trees are not sufficient for the rich tapestry of native trees and plants that have always sustained wildlife. Their loss is one reason for a rapid decline of our songbirds. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides kill our valuable pollinating insects—butterflies and honeybees.

What can I do?

Make your property more friendly to wildlife. Read inside…
**Keep the Night Sky Dark**

Do you enjoy country evenings and seeing the stars at night, far away from the glare of all-night lights and superhighways?

Shield your outdoor bulbs to direct light to the ground.

Be courteous to neighbors: don’t leave outdoor lights on all night. Bright, artificial lights confuse nocturnal wildlife (like owls) and migrating birds that need the night sky dark. Nature’s insect patrol, toads and bats, are hard at work after dark.

**Be a Homeowner for Habitat**

Save growth along old fencerows; it often includes flowering trees, berry bushes and wildflowers. Plants along fencerows and roadides provide a “corridor” of connected habitat for wildlife.

**Create a Bird and Butterfly Garden**

It’s easy to do in your own backyard, and fun for children and adults. Start with native plants—many have attractive flowers and others are “host” plants for caterpillars that become butterflies. Combine flowers with shrubs to create a plant community that is a real habitat. Avoid pesticides or herbicides that poison birds who are the best insect control. They can also harm honeybees and butterflies, our valuable pollinators. Keep a bird bath nearby filled with fresh water.

**Plant a Tree**

It’s the single best thing you can do for the environment—and yourself. Trees are beautiful and they add height, shape, color, and texture to our home landscapes. Trees provide shade, windbreaks and privacy screening; they enhance air quality, provide the oxygen we breathe and cool summer air temperatures.

Choose trees that are regional natives; check the conditions of your site: right plant + right place = success!

**Protect Our Water**

- Avoid using chemicals that can seep into streams and ground water and pollute wells.
- Encourage natural growth along stream banks to control erosion and on pond banks to provide cover for wildlife.
- Save existing wet areas, no matter how small. Wetlands, springs and streams are all important parts of our natural watershed.
- Don’t fill in bogs and shallow ponds—these are vital habitat for frogs, toads and turtles.

**Our home is on open land…**

Do I have to mow all that?

No! Consider landscaping alternatives to a lawn that can be attractive and mean less work for you.

The Bad News: Lawns cost you time, effort and money.

Tired of spending every weekend seeding, feeding, spraying, watering, weeding, mowing, edging, raking? Mowers shatter the quiet and pollute the air, chemicals endanger our environment. Acres of lawn provide no habitat, and wildlife ends up…banished.

The Good News: less IS more.

Less lawn means more time for you—time with your family, to enjoy nature and living in the country.

- Plant less lawn and more “natural green”—a meadow of native grasses and flowers: mow paths for walking.
- Choose native plants and shrubs.
- Keep woodlands and fields natural; save existing trees and shrubs.

Plant shrubs and trees. Many favorite birds only nest in leafy branches, never in boxes: robins, cardinals, catbirds, song sparrows, goldfinches, wood thrushes and warblers.

Build a brush pile

Leave a space for a small brush pile in a quiet corner of your yard. Add leaves, branches and yard waste and don’t disturb. It will soon become a haven for wildlife.

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Enjoy native woodland wildflowers in the spring.

**If our home is in a woodland…**

What should we do?

Little or nothing! With a “don’t disturb” policy, your woods can be beautiful and a haven for wildlife.

- Let dead trees stand when possible—they are home to owls, woodpeckers and other cavity-nesters.
- Fallen logs and branches provide insects and grubs for birds.
- Never plant grass in a woodland.
- Clear out “invasive alien” plants, like Japanese honeysuckle, that choke out our native plants.
- Leave the leaves! Leaf cover is nature’s own mulch—no raking needed. Clear walking trails and leave the forest floor undisturbed.

**Smaller CAN be better!**

Small trees (whips) cost less and are often more vigorous and quicker to establish than larger specimens, which can suffer transplant shock.

**Join with neighbors—Plant a cluster of native trees and shrubs for beautiful boundaries that create privacy and save a place for wildlife.**

**Where property lines meet**

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