

Starting in Our Own Backyards

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A few years ago when John and I first started becoming involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, we felt it was important to “practice what we preached.” So we started in our own backyard.

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System has programs for golf courses, schools, corporate and business properties, as well as a program for back yards. We felt that if we were going to be encouraging people to go through the certification process, we needed to better understand what was involved.

We joined the backyard program in 1994 as a family project. In 1995, we became the first fully certified Audubon Backyard Sanctuary in the program. Going through the certification process in our own backyard gave us a better understanding of Audubon and the certification process.

In the backyard program, there are four categories: Wildlife and Habitat Management, Water Enhancement and Conservation, Energy Conservation, and Waste Management.

The certification process is similar to the golf program. You fill out a Resource Inventory for your property, and then you work toward certification in the categories.

John, Hunter, Elizabeth and I found the entire process to be educational and fun. I know that John and I learned a lot, and the effect on our children does not go unnoticed.

Our 11-year-old son, Hunter, will not



The neighborhood gopher tortoise visits our backyard. Photo by Shelly Foy.



You can't live with them and you can't live without them—when you have bird feeders in your backyard. Photo by Shelly Foy.

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One of four nest boxes we have in our 1/4 acre backyard. Photo by Shelly Foy.



My biggest stress reliever—butterfly gardening. Photo by Shelly Foy.

tell you to look at the bird in the tree. He tells you to look at the red-bellied woodpecker in the slash pine tree. Elizabeth, who just turned 10, becomes upset because she thinks her brother knows more about birds than she does.

However, this is the same child that could name more Florida birds than the majority of us. They know about recycling and composting and the importance of saving water. They could probably write their own book about butterfly gardening and using native plants.

Yes, we hear them complain occasionally about working in the yard and yes, Hunter tells me to forget about him joining the "Weed Whacker" club at middle school next year.

However, we also see them turning the water off instead of letting it run when they brush their teeth. We note that they are the first ones to tell us that the painted buntings are at one of the bird feeders. We feel good when Elizabeth notices that the bird feeders are empty and refills them on her own.

John and I like that our family cares about nature and the environment and that we do our part to protect it. We do it,

not because someone tells us to or reminds us to, but because we want to.

As golf course superintendents, becoming involved with the backyard program is a way to involve your families in something that you do every day—work with nature. You could also use the backyard program as an educational tool with your golfers or course officials.

Call Audubon at (518) 767-9051 and ask them to send you some backyard brochures. Share these with people at your golf course. Make it a friendly competition among friends to see who becomes certified first. The cost is \$35, \$25 for seniors.

Our family encourages yours to become involved in the backyard program. Make it a family project and spend some time bonding with each other and with nature.

This oak tree snag in the Jackson backyard in Orlando became a home for a pair of red bellied woodpeckers this spring. Photo by Joel Jackson.

