

# livescapes

SPECIAL SECTION OF *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*

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## Bringing Nature HOME

**THE RIGHT LANDSCAPING CAN ATTRACT WILDLIFE TO YOUR CLIENTS' PROPERTY.**

BY KENDALL WEYERS

**A**S WILD PLACES across our country become increasingly hard to find, more and more people are looking for ways to bring some of that wilderness closer to home. They want to create their own little oasis to enjoy a taste of the wonder and beauty that nature offers. Closely watching a butterfly take tiny sips of nectar or marveling in the energetic industriousness of a squirrel can put the observer in the midst of the wild, even if they're in the middle of a bustling metropolis.

This can be accomplished by landscaping for wildlife. Careful selection and placement of plants and other features that benefit wildlife can bring a variety of creatures within easy view of the nearest patio or window.



Some wildlife can be a mixed blessing in the landscape. Squirrels, for example, are entertaining to watch, but could become pests for some homeowners.

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Any home or business with outdoor spaces can be part of this growing trend.

### Why wildlife

Beyond the natural beauty wildlife can bring to a landscape, there are many practical benefits of landscaping for wildlife. A major one is economic. The plants used to attract wildlife are frequently natives, and because natives are adapted to the local ecosystem, they are hardy and thrive with fewer inputs. Fewer inputs equal lower costs. Plus, a better balanced landscape has a web of natural controls that help keep destructive insects and rodents in check, resulting in further economic benefit.



### NWF CERTIFICATION OFFERED

Since 1973 the National Wildlife Federation has been offering a program to certify home wildlife habitats. Its website ([www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/](http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/)) has a wealth of detailed information to help successfully design and implement a wildlife habitat plan. It explains all the necessary components, including food, water, cover, and green gardening techniques, and offers links for more specifics.

Landscaping for wildlife also aids in the overall health and balance of local ecosystems. By increasing diversity, the richness and resilience of the landscape also increases. According to the National Wildlife Federation, loss of habitat is the highest current threat to wildlife. Increasing quality habitat around our homes and businesses can help offset losses elsewhere.

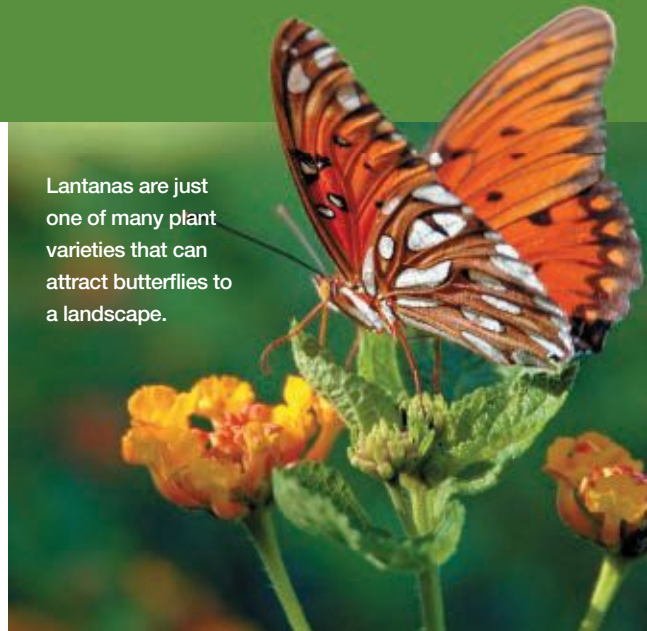
It's also significant that landscaping for wildlife fits hand in hand with sustainable landscaping. To successfully attract an abundance and variety of wildlife, the landscape must be treated gently, with careful use of resources. Mulching, composting, wise water use, and controlling runoff are all sustainable landscaping techniques that also make a site more appealing to wildlife.

### Pieces of the puzzle

To attract wildlife, landscapers must try to meet as many basic needs as possible. This means food, water, and shelter. Of course, all sites have limitations, but the more wildlife is provided for, the more wildlife the site will have.

A great way to provide food is by using native varieties of plants. The plants and the wildlife of an area are already adapted to provide for each other, with the plants receiving pollination and seed dispersal and the animals getting nourishment in the form of nuts, fruits, berries, foliage, nectar, and pollen. The plants also provide the animals cover to hide from

Lantanas are just one of many plant varieties that can attract butterflies to a landscape.



predators, escape the elements, and raise their young.

Every region has its own blend of natives, but many are widespread across the country. Oak, hackberry, elderberry, dogwood, viburnum, honeysuckle, juniper, milkweed, asters, and goldenrod all are favorites of wildlife, and there are varieties of each native to most of the U.S. For more specific recommendations for your area, check out the "Top 10 Native Plants by Region" at [www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife](http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife). Even more detailed information can be found at [www.wildflower.org/explore](http://www.wildflower.org/explore), the website for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Information Network.

All wildlife needs water, and this need can be satisfied in various ways. Having an existing spring, stream, pond, or wetland to enhance is ideal. The next best option is installing a pond, rain gardens, or bird-baths. Many different types of animals are attracted to water, so it is the best single

*continued on page 56*



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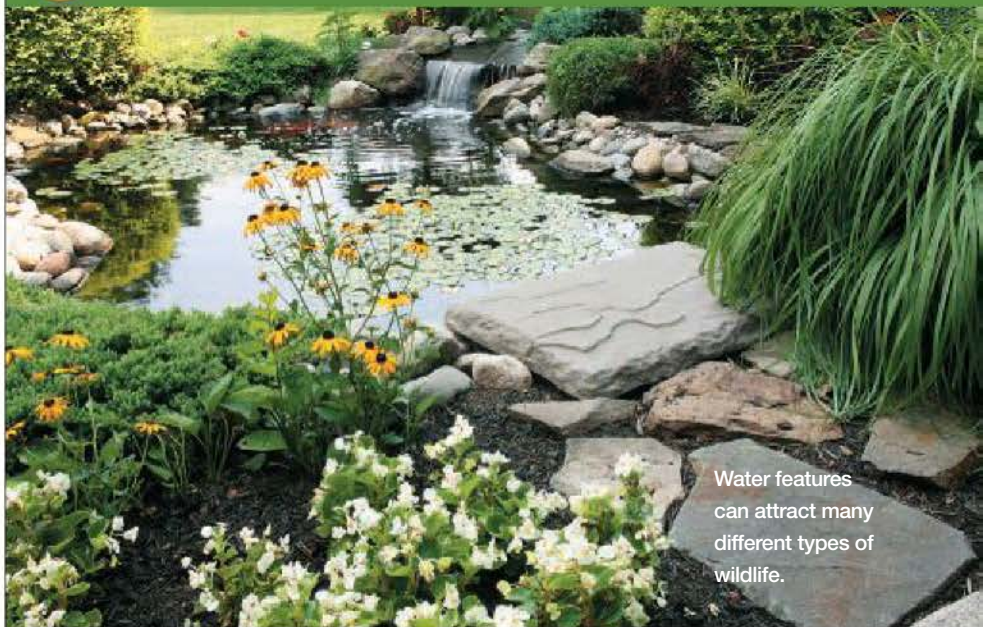
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> WILDLIFE



*continued from page 54*

step to bring in a diverse list of creatures.

Cover for wildlife can take many forms, depending on which animals you want to attract. A dense thicket or spruce tree for birds, a pond for amphibians and fish, or a brush or rock pile for small mammals and reptiles.

**The reality checks**

First of all, it is important to remember that landscaping that attracts wildlife doesn't meet everyone's ideal. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so where some see a beautiful cluster of wildflowers, others see an overgrown weed patch. Bees, snakes, frogs, and bats are all part of a vibrant habitat, yet may be feared or despised by clients. Local zoning codes may not even allow the types of plants and management best suited to landscaping for wildlife. These various standards and attitudes must be considered whenever creating something a little less than conventional.

Although any space can be enhanced

to benefit wildlife, in the case of habitat size really does matter. More space simply gives a better opportunity to provide the diversity necessary for a quality habitat. Small spaces can be effective, but options are limited.

Another drawback is that patience is a must. Depending on the type of landscape and wildlife expected, it may take years to reach the level desired. Natives give lasting beauty, but usually not immediately.

However, anyone with an unused corner of their yard or an over-sized, under-used area of turf grass is a candidate for wildlife landscaping. Acreage owners and businesses with large outdoor spaces should be high on the list of potential clients. With the green attributes of landscaping for wildlife, expect it to have growing appeal as sustainable landscaping goes more and more mainstream.

Wildlife landscaping is an opportunity for landscapers to create a niche market that is likely to grow. 🌱

**Weyers is a landscape contractor based in Nebraska.**



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