

Rockville Community Wildlife Habitat

A group of Rockville residents and volunteers is seeking, on behalf of The City of Rockville, certification from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) as a Community Wildlife Habitat.

To achieve certification, parks and facility grounds such as schools, churches and synagogues must provide the four basic elements of a Community Wildlife Habitat. Those elements are food, water, cover and places for animals to raise young.



The group must also demonstrate that sustainable gardening—creation of gardens that require limited fertilizer and water—is practiced in residential backyards and elsewhere in the City. The effort toward certification will provide environmental and aesthetic benefits to City residents and the community.

What is a National Wildlife Federation (NWF) Certified Community Wildlife Habitat?

A Community Wildlife Habitat can exist when citizens come together to provide habitats for wildlife throughout the community. Citizens can easily create these habitats in their backyards, and small groups can also do so on school grounds, at parks, churches, synagogues and businesses.



Through the process of becoming a Community Wildlife Habitat, residents will learn about sustainable gardening practices such as using native plants and removing invasive plants, reducing or eliminating chemical fertilizers and pesticides, conserving water and maintaining habitats to promote healthy living for all of the community's creatures. Adoption of these practices will improve the environment.

You can help the City of Rockville to become a Community Wildlife Habitat by creating your own wildlife habitat and seeking certification with the National Wildlife Federation. Even if you choose not to certify your habitat, but still choose to take some of the steps, you will help to better the environment and increase [biodiversity](#) within the City of Rockville.

What would I need to do to create my own wildlife-friendly habitat?

A [National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat](#)[™] is a geographic location defined by borders where the four basic elements for wildlife—food, water, cover and resources for raising young—are provided and where sustainable gardening is practiced. The NWF issues [certification](#) to areas that meet designated criteria for provision of the basic elements and follows sustainable gardening practices. There is a \$20 fee associated with certification. Residents can also obtain from the National Wildlife Federation a sign to place in their yard identifying it as a

certified wildlife habitat. The sign costs \$30.

If you or your organization is interested in creating a wildlife habitat you need to provide at least three sources of food, and you need to incorporate some [sustainable gardening practices](#).

Why should I create a backyard wildlife habitat?

There are many benefits to restoring ecosystems and increasing biodiversity. If resources for native creatures are not provided, these creatures may disappear, as many have already. Creatures such as birds and insects are important to the environment because they help pollinate our food crops and can help control populations of biting insects such as mosquitoes. Increasing use of native plants and removing non-native invasive plants provides such support.



Provide resources for native creatures

Landscape with Native plants

One way to do this is to use native plants and remove non-native invasive plants. [Native plants](#) are good for the environment because they have grown and evolved in this area with the animals that depend on them. They are desirable because they are generally more pest and disease resistant, and once established require little fertilizer and less water than non-native plants. Native plants provide food, cover and places for insects and birds to raise their young. Many native plants provide food for bees and other pollinators, which in turn help the native plants to reproduce.

Many species of butterflies require certain species of plants to reproduce. Making those species available in your yard attracts butterflies. Because the plants and animals that depend on them evolved together, their relationship is key to their survival. These important life cycles are often broken when native plants are not available.

In addition to the insects attracted by native plants, those with berries provide food for birds.



Many of the plants that bloom in Rockville yards and parks that attract insects and birds are not considered native. For example, many azaleas, lilacs and some Black-eyed Susans are not classified as "native." In fact, the number of native plants available commercially is relatively limited.

Sometimes nurseries can help to identify whether plants are native, and sometimes they don't know the precise origin of the plants in inventory. While some plants (e.g., English bluebell, Chinese lantern) are clearly imports from another region or country, many plants that are common in the area may be long-ago imports from other locations that have adapted well to the area. However, various lists are available to help identify native plants.

Remove Non-native Invasive Plants

[Non-native invasive plant species](#) are extremely bad for the environment. They grow and spread, choke out desirable plant species and provide less than optimal habitats for wildlife. Their broad coverage reduces the level of biodiversity necessary for a healthy environment. When introduced into the wild, they degrade local ecosystems. Some examples of non-native plant species are bamboo, English ivy, periwinkle, common daylily, privet, and Bradford pear.

- [Resources on non-native invasive plants](#)

Conserve water and improve water quality

Water conservation and purification efforts such as using rain barrels and employing conservation landscaping techniques to reduce stormwater run-off can be elements of a wildlife habitat.

Rain barrels, conservation landscaping and rain gardens capture water containing air contaminants that have settled on roofs. This allows polluted water to be redirected back into flowerbeds and not contaminate Rockville's waterways. If enough people utilize these techniques water quality will improve in City streams and tributaries, and that ultimately affects the Chesapeake Bay.

- [Resources on water conservation and stormwater runoff management](#)

Reduce carbon emissions and gasoline costs

An ancillary environmental advantage (although not necessarily a direct advantage to backyard wildlife) to a reduction in lawn area is that not as much mowing is required.

Exercise creativity and enjoy social interactions

The attributes in a wildlife habitat can reflect your personal preferences based on the environmental features of your property. No matter how large or small your yard is, you can provide the necessary elements to create a wildlife habitat and encourage wildlife to visit and prosper in your yard. Even window boxes have been certified.

By joining this effort, you will have the opportunity to meet other people learning to create habitats.

How do I create a Certified Wildlife Habitat?

Choose landscape options that appeal to you and that work well with your habitat's characteristics. What are the sunny and shady areas of your yard? What areas are wet or dry? Is the soil sandy, clay or loam? Can you fortify the soil easily with compost? Select native plants that will grow well in the different sections of your yard.

Consider what types of wildlife might be in your area, make planting plans and incorporate water and shelter sources that might attract the wildlife you hope to see. Keep in mind that deer should be in forest edges, not on residential property. If you are in an area with deer, consider planting items that do not attract deer.

- [Resources that will help you create your wildlife habitat](#)

Aside from certifying a habitat, how can I help Rockville to become certified?

You can participate in City outreach and volunteer programs such as Adopt-A-Stream, seasonal stream clean-ups and invasive plant pulls. These also accrue points for the City. You might also support activities like native plant sales and workshops.

A minimum number of points must be accrued in each of four categories: habitat certification, education, community projects and administration. A volunteer Habitat Team will sponsor activities in the community to educate residents, certify habitats and organize community projects, and fulfill administrative duties.



The total number of points that must be accrued is based on the City's population. As a city of more than 60,000 residents, Rockville must accrue 500 points. Once a community is certified, it must continue programs to maintain its certification. It must achieve a certain number of points annually.

We welcome your feedback. Please direct questions regarding Rockville's Community Wildlife Habitat effort to wildlifehabitat@rockvillemd.gov. If you are interested in the City's volunteer programs, please contact environment@rockvillemd.gov.