

News Release

National Wildlife Federation Shows People How to Garden for Wildlife

By Dan Svedarsky, Elizabeth Tollefson on Tuesday, October 16, 2007

CROOKSTON, Minn. (October 16, 2007) – The National Wildlife Federation® (NWF) announces that the University of Minnesota, Crookston Nature Nook, located on the campus has been certified as an official Wildlife Habitat site. The property attracts a variety of birds, butterflies and other wildlife while helping to protect the local environment. With the help of NWF, many habitat enthusiasts have turned their yards and other garden spaces into enticing wildlife refuges.

"The Nature Nook project is a wonderful example of student, staff and faculty working together to plan, develop grants and install plantings for wildlife habitat. The project is enjoyed by the campus community and is a popular attraction to the general public and prospective study," said Professor Dan Svedarsky, Ph.D., head of the Natural Resources Department.

NWF began the Wildlife Habitat certification program in 1973, and has since certified over 75,000 habitats nationwide. The majority of these sites represent the hard work and commitment of individuals and families providing habitat near their homes, but NWF has also certified more than 2,500 schools and hundreds of business and community sites. Certified habits can be found everywhere from post offices, hospitals and places of worship to community parks, corporate buildings and municipal facilities. The average habitat is between 1/3 and 1/2 acre, but certified sites range from urban balconies to thousand-acre areas.

Any habitat enthusiast can create a certified habitat and learn the rewards of gardening for wildlife. NWF teaches the importance of environmental stewardship by providing guidelines for making landscapes more hospitable to wildlife. In order to become certified, a property must provide the four basic elements that all wildlife need: food, water, cover and places to raise young. It must also employ sustainable gardening practices. Habitat restoration is critical in urban and suburban settings where commercial and residential development encroaches on natural wildlife areas. In addition to providing for wildlife, certified habits conserve our natural resources by reducing or eliminating the needs for fertilizers, pesticides or irrigation water, which ultimately protects the air, soil and water throughout our communities.

Creating habitats not only helps wildlife, it can help reduce global warming pollution and save money as well. Burning fossil fuels to heat and cool our homes and maintain our lawns releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which is the main greenhouse gas responsible for global warming.

Replacing lawns with strategically located trees and other native vegetation can insulate our homes from heat, cold and wind, reducing our heating and cooling needs and thus our carbon dioxide emissions. And, unlike lawns, wildlife-friendly native plants don't need constant maintenance from gas guzzling lawn mowers or fertilizers that require fossil fuels to manufacture. On top of this, plants actually absorb carbon dioxide, helping to further reduce the amount in the atmosphere. All of this adds up to increased wildlife habitat, reduction in excessive carbon dioxide that causes global warming and reduced energy bills for homeowners.

Habitats can produce other financial rewards for homeowners. Realtors may promote the certified status of homes for sale, because they see it as a selling feature. It's an attractive element to many potential home buyers looking to share their landscape with Mother Nature. Potential homeowners who are attracted to a house with certified habitat are also more likely to maintain the habitat once they take ownership.

NWF has received numerous testimonials from program participants who find their efforts rewarding and fun for the whole family. As one participant wrote, "I am a beginner, but judging from the many birds, squirrels, butterflies and rabbits, along with the flowers blooming everywhere in my yard, I must be on the right track."

Few people understand how just one person can make a difference. David Mizejewski, NWF naturalist and host of the Animal Planet series "Backyard Habitat," says, "It's easy to feel that there is no hope for wildlife in our modern world of smog, traffic and asphalt. But there is hope. Each of us can make our own piece of the Earth a healthy, green space that helps restore the ecological balance. Encouraging your neighbors to join with you can lead to a neighborhood or community habitat that provides wildlife with greater incentive to call your piece of the earth home."

Participants who achieve certification receive membership in the National Wildlife Federation, including a one-year subscription to the award-winning National Wildlife magazine with inspiring wildlife articles and amazing picture photography. They also receive a personalized certificate and quarterly newsletters, and are eligible to post NWF's special outdoor sign designating their yard or garden as wildlife-friendly.

NWF now offers the most comprehensive guide to date on gardening for wildlife, authored by Mizejewski. The 128-page Attracting Birds, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife won the Independent Book Publishers Association 2005 award for Best Gardening/Agriculture Book of the Year. It is full of practical how-to information to make your yard a wildlife haven and certify your property as an official NWF Backyard Wildlife Habitat site. The book, which costs \$12.95, is available at www.nwf.org/backyard, along with information on getting certified online and lots of other habitat information. It can also be ordered by calling 800-900-2656.

The mission of the National Wildlife Federation is to inspire Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

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