



Trees For Wildlife

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Trees are nature's air conditioners. They shade and cool our homes, bring songbirds close by and mark the changing seasons. Kids love to climb them and sometimes build tree houses among their branches. For all of us, trees are a source of lumber, food and countless products – and they beautify our communities and countryside. You can plant trees and become a part of the “Plant a Million” project. Find out more about this exciting new project by visiting www.plantamillion.org on the internet. The goal of the project is to help people understand the importance of trees and their management and to plant a million native trees in central Indiana.

Equally important, trees conserve energy, reduce soil erosion, clean the air we breathe and help protect river and stream water quality. If trees are to provide all these benefits, we need to care for the trees we have and plant more for the future. Central Indiana's ten Soil and Water Conservation Districts and their partnership agencies are a source technical help in deciding what tree or shrub species to plant based on soil and other considerations.

Birds and small animals need concealed places for nesting and hiding, protected from the eyes of predators. Planting conifers or evergreen trees, preferably in a group of three or more trees, can create such places in a farmyard or back yard. Planting hedges with low branches are another great bird habitat. Prickly or thorny plants keep some predators away. Planting shrubs or plants with overhanging branches are another good practice. Bird habitat doesn't stop with trees and shrubs; try building sloping, rock-faced mounds where birds can probe for food in rock crevices or forage on the sheltered slopes.

When planting trees to improve wildlife habitat, consider the importance of providing food trees. Good species for summer fruit are cherries, dogwood, plums and apricots. Seeds are great bird and small mammal food. For this plant ashes, birches, firs, hemlock, maples, spruces and sweet gum. Butternut, black walnut, chestnuts, hazels, hickories, oaks and pecans produce nuts and acorns. Winter fruits from apples, crabapples, dogwood, hackberry, hawthorns and mountain ash are special when other sources of food are snow covered.

No matter what their individual food preferences may be, all birds and animals need a dependable source of water close by. This can be supplied by creating a small pond or birdbath in a protected area. Even a dripping tap in the farmyard falling into a shallow pan will work.

Songbirds are natural pest control specialists and are important in the city and country for that reason. You can increase their presence with trees that provide both food and protection from their predators. Contact your local County Soil and Water Conservation District for copies of publications like “Backyard Conservation” or “Your Yard, Your Trees” that can help you plan a great farmyard or backyard.