



Creating a Habitat Garden

Backyards for Wildlife Fact Sheet

Creating a Wildlife Friendly Garden

The Adelaide region today is very different from how the European settlers saw it in the 1830's. Over the years, most of the native vegetation of the Adelaide Plains has been cleared or vastly modified. This loss of natural habitat has resulted in the serious decline in the populations of our native wildlife.

In a good habitat garden you could expect to see a variety of birds, insects, bats, small animals, reptiles and maybe even frogs either living in your garden or visiting from time to time. Unfortunately, most urban gardens are uninviting places for native fauna – offering little food and no safe haven, except for perhaps a few species that are favoured by these altered conditions. You can help encourage the return of our native wildlife to our urban environments by creating gardens that offer both shelter and food throughout the year.

Check out the following five basic principles of a *Backyard for Wildlife*, and you will see how easy it is to turn your backyard into a wildlife friendly habitat garden.

1 – Local Plants

The plants that originally flourished across the Adelaide region were naturally adapted to the area and supported a rich array of animal wildlife. It naturally follows that the best plants for the creation of your 'Backyard for Wildlife' are local native species.

Many nurseries now specialise in growing a vast array of local native plant species that will bring colour and life to your garden through the year.

Using local native plants will help recreate some of the relationships that existed between native plants and native wildlife. Furthermore these species are better adapted to local climate and soil conditions allowing better water conservation and less watering cost. They are also less likely to be susceptible to diseases and insect attack and reduce the threat of environmental weeds.



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2 – Range of Plant Heights

Across the Adelaide Plains there were many different types of plants of varying shapes and sizes. The more variety that you can provide in the structure of your garden the greater the diversity of animals you are likely to attract. These different vegetation levels provide a diverse food supply and safe retreats for a wide variety of wildlife. A particular species may feed in one layer but shelter or breed in another.

To mimic bushland your wildlife friendly garden should include the following different layers (heights):

1. Upperstorey: Tall trees such as Eucalypts, Native Pines, and tall wattles;
2. Middlestorey: Small trees and tall shrubs like low wattles, banksias, sheoaks, tea trees, Sweet Bursaria and bottlebrushes;
3. Shrub layer: Medium shrubs that range from 0.5 to 1 metres, like hakeas, correas and hopbushes;
4. Understorey: Low shrubs (<0.5m) and other understorey plants like lilies, grasses, creepers and orchids; and
5. Ground Covers: Ground cover plants and leaf matter, mulch, fallen branches, logs and rocks. Just remember that you need to source rocks and logs from an appropriate supplier and not from bushland where they are important to our remaining wildlife.



Native Lilac, *Hardenbergia violaceae* (photo Ben Moulton)

3 – Flowers throughout the Year

Before settlement there were many different environments across Adelaide such as swamps, grassy plains, sand ridges and hillsides. This variety meant that throughout the year there was always something flowering nearby that was able to provide food for local wildlife. Using plants that flower across the seasons will encourage wildlife to visit your garden.

Autumn and winter-flowering plants are often the ones that are missing from our gardens, so try to include species like banksias and hakeas.

4 – Responsible Pet Management

If you own a dog or cat you need to ensure that it is not going to use your habitat garden as a hunting ground. Whilst domestic pets are great companions it must be remembered that they can also wreak havoc on our native wildlife. Cats are capable of killing large numbers of birds, lizards, frogs and insects. Inquisitive dogs can be the same, and if allowed to run free in bushland can damage native plants, especially small lilies and orchids. They can also chase ground and water birds away from their nests.

5 – Minimise Chemical Use

Use non-chemical approaches whenever you can to limit the impacts of chemicals on the soil health and its microbial communities. Herbicides, pesticides and fungicides should be used with due care as they can have deadly effects on native plants and animals and can pollute surrounding waterways. A safer alternative is white oil, which smothers rather than poisons, and is digestible by humans with no ill affects. There are alternatives to the use of chemicals for controlling weeds and other pests. These include the use of hand-weeding, plant competition, and mulching.

However chemical sprays, when used minimally and safely can give reliable and quick results. The safe use of chemicals is not difficult provided you follow a few basic rules. Read and understand the label, taking special note of the rate of application, preparation instructions and safety directions. Make sure the chemical is designed to control the pest you are using it against. Do not spray in adverse weather conditions, e.g. on windy days. Avoid spraying when fatigued to ensure careful and purposeful application. Be particularly careful when using chemicals near waterways or storm-water drains to prevent runoff and harmful contamination. Take appropriate personal safety precautions. Store your chemicals in a dry, cool shed or cupboard dedicated to that purpose. They must be kept in sound original containers that are fully labelled and tightly sealed.

Why a Backyard for Wildlife?

In Australia, gardening has been recognised as one of our favourite pastimes and what we do in our home gardens has the potential to benefit or harm the natural environment.

By choosing to develop and maintain a garden that follows the five basic Backyards for Wildlife principles (see below), you can help contribute to a better local environment while at the same time conserve our local flora and fauna, create important habitat, reduce your maintenance costs, and reduce the threat of invasive environmental weeds.

Backyards for Wildlife principles:

1. USE LOCALLY NATIVE PLANTS.
2. USE PLANTS THAT ARE A RANGE OF HEIGHTS.
3. PROVIDE FLOWERS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.
4. MANAGE YOUR PETS RESPONSIBLY.
5. MINIMISE CHEMICAL USE.

Please consider applying some of these principles to your own backyard, so that together we can all help grow a great living environment for Adelaide.

Find Out More

Visit www.backyards4wildlife.com.au to access more Backyards for Wildlife and biodiversity information including an interactive map with lists of what grew in your suburb prior to 1836, a plant database and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.



Backyards for Wildlife is managed by the SA Department for Environment and Heritage, with support from the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government

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