

A Good Habitat...

- ◆ provides food, water and shelter for a variety of native wildlife species
- ◆ incorporates the use of native plants in the landscape plan
- ◆ takes into account that plants and animals are interrelated in a complex food web

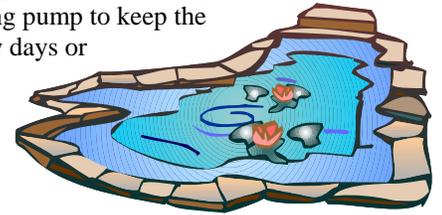
You can create or improve a **SCHOOLYARD HABITAT** by incorporating these main “ingredients”....

NATIVE SHRUBS AND TREES that provide food and cover.



- **Shrubs:** chokeberry (*Aronia*); chokecherry (*Prunus*); winterberry and inkberry (*Ilex*); bayberry and wax myrtle (*Myrica*); blackberry (*Rubus*); *Viburnums* (e.g. arrowwood, blackhaw, cranberry bush)
- **Trees:** black cherry (*Prunus serotina*); dogwoods (*Cornus*); hollies (*Ilex*); oaks (*Quercus*); eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*); blackgum (*Nyssa*); eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*)
- Select native, deciduous shrubs for their flowering and fruiting quality and persistence. Group your plant material in clusters to provide maximum shelter for nesting birds. Be sure the overall composition also includes evergreens that provide important protection from winter’s cold and summer’s heat. “Layer” the vegetation so that your habitat contains a variety of plant heights.

WATER SOURCES, such as shallow pools for amphibians and small mammals, and pedestal baths for songbirds. In small water features, you can avoid a mosquito problem by changing the water frequently or by adding a “mosquito dunk” of BT (a bacteria that kills mosquito eggs but does not harm other insect larvae). Or, use a circulating pump to keep the water moving, which will discourage mosquitoes from laying their eggs. Clean birdbaths every few days or so with several quick swipes of a scrub brush, then add fresh water. A dilute bleach solution can also be used in the bird bath if algae have built up around the rim; however, be sure to rinse well.



NECTAR SOURCES for butterflies, hummingbirds, and other

vital pollinators. Examples include native flowering shrubs like azalea (*Rhododendron*), pepperbush (*Clethra*), sweetspire (*Itea*), and buttonbush (*Cephalanthus*). Plant flowerbeds with native perennials, such as *Asters*, milkweeds (*Asclepias*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia*), coneflower (*Echinacea*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*), goldenrod (*Solidago*), bergamot and bee balm (*Monarda*).

BIRD FEEDERS



There are numerous styles and designs of feeders on the market. A platform feeder holds millet and other seed in an uncovered tray that sits on four legs about 10 inches off the ground; it is useful for mourning doves. A hopper feeder, good for cardinals and other birds which prefer sunflowers, is a box that dispenses seed from the sides, and it can be mounted on a pole or suspended from a tree. A thistle feeder is a vertical tube with tiny slits in the side, designed for finches, and a suet feeder is a screened square or mesh bag through which a woodpecker or nuthatch can peck. Try to hang your feeder out of reach of squirrels, or put the feeder on a pole and use a baffle above and below it. Avoid feeding old bread and other kitchen scraps, as these items attract starlings and crows. Do NOT feed mammals like deer and raccoons with corn, apples, dog food, etc.—these species can become a neighborhood nuisance.

NEST BOXES If possible, leave a dead tree or stump standing on the school grounds for woodpeckers to make nest holes, insects to lay their eggs, and other wildlife to feed and raise their young. If there are no dead trees nearby, put up a birdhouse for cavity-nesting species like the chickadee, nuthatch, wren and bluebird. A birdhouse should have some vent holes at the top and drainage holes on the bottom; it does not need a perch on the front. A specially constructed bat box may be used by a small colony of little brown bats, which are important nighttime insect eaters. Do NOT install a “butterfly house”—these are sold merely for looks and are not used by butterflies!



BRUSH PILES OR ROCK PILES Small animals like chipmunks, rabbits, lizards and toads require suitable places to hide from predators. A small rock pile or brush pile constructed of medium-sized branches might be sited in an out-of-the-way place on school grounds. Try hiding the pile with a native vine like Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*), or trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*).

****An effective SCHOOLYARD HABITAT functions as a small food web for many species.****

For details about hosting a WILD School Sites teacher workshop, contact the Habitat Education program coordinator at the VA Department of Game & Inland Fisheries: Carol.Heiser@dgif.virginia.gov