

Winterize Your Yard for Wildlife



In icy conditions, use sand or non-toxic ice melters because salt is toxic to many things.

If you trim bushes and trees, make a small brush pile in an out-of-the-way corner of your yard to keep birds warm. Birds and other animals need a place to hide from hawks and other predators. It doesn't take much - a Holiday tree can also work as quick cover if it is fresh-cut and untreated by pesticides.

Consider purchasing heated birdbaths or heating elements that can be safely added to outdoor water. Keep clean baths 3" or less deep and add gravel or stones if it is slippery. Place them 10-15 feet from cover. You may see a line of birds in your yard when the river freezes.

Leave seed heads up until spring to provide natural bird food. Wait to cut bushes and grasses high (4" or so) after Mother's Day because many things live there that will be food for birds. Trim dead trees into snags and leave them up permanently (if not a hazard) for wildlife winter homes.



Butterfly overwintering under bark of a tree
Mourning Cloak Photo by Julie Zickefoose

Home, Sweet Home

Be proactive to prevent wildlife from being able to get into your heated home. Here are some starters:

1. Store bird seed in heavyweight containers with tight lids (if needed, a bungee cord can help)
2. Check seed containers for bite marks
3. Clean up any spilled seed in your storage area
4. Feed birds in the morning, only enough for the day
5. Rinse recycling to keep it from attracting animals
6. Cap your chimney
7. Close garage doors consistently
8. Caulk small openings*

*Avoid using expanding insulation spray because rodents may scratch it off and use it to keep warm.

I discover more and more that what I do in my yard makes a positive difference. Winter is a great time for planning. Imagine - what do you want in your yard next summer?

Read about organic lawn and garden care if you aren't already practicing it. Search the internet for information about plants native to your area. The more healthy insects and native plants I have in the yard, the more butterflies, songbirds and hummingbirds I have an opportunity to see up close and personal. I see migrating warblers in the backyard in spring and fall!

Birds and berries go together more than just on holiday cards. Consider planting native plants that berry throughout the winter into early spring and consider placing evergreens to block cold winds (usually south and west).

Get Certified: Putting up National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat sign helps others understand the purpose of the yard and encourages them to help wildlife too.

Lessons learned? If you're interested, email subscribe@backyardhabitat.info to get on our monthly 'Nature Scoop' email or go to www.backyardhabitat.info to learn more. Let's work together to help wildlife, one yard at a time.