

Landscaping with animals in mind

By RAY SHER, Urban Harvest

A landscape that brings not only diversity in plant life but an abundance of animal life presents nature right to your doorstep. Think of opening your window and hearing frogs croaking and birds chirping. Think of walking a few feet into your yard and seeing anole lizards, butterflies by the dozens, geckos, skinks, walking sticks, tiny beneficial flies and wasps, birds and moths the size of hummingbirds.

This may sound like a night-dream or just something that you have day-dreamed but thought it could never happen in Houston. However, it will happen if you want it and are willing to spend a few hours reading and learning about the plants that will attract these critters.



Wildflowers and grasses can play host to nature's wildlife.

How to Bring this Dream to Reality

Grab a few books that focus on appropriate plants for our hot humid climate. Check out the plants that work for the environments that you have in your yard.

There may be areas of your yard that get significant sun or mostly shade. There may be areas where the soil is high and dry, or is often moist, wet or boggy. There are plants for all these environments, and all you have to do is choose the plants for each environment, plant them, and wait for the critters to arrive.

Getting Down to Specific Plants

Some plants, because of their flower shape, color, scent, nectar or food provided, attract specific wildlife. Examples are [Hamelia Patens](#) for hummingbirds, [Butterfly/Milk Weed](#) for the Monarch caterpillar, and [parsley](#), [dill](#), [cilantro](#), [yarrow](#) and Queen Anne's Lace for beneficial flies, wasps and other small insects.

Carefully selecting plants will surely bring the diversity of life to your landscape that will enrich your life.

Consider Size of Plants

There are many choices of plant size, including ground covers, small bushes and ornamental grasses, climbing vines, large bushes and fruit trees. Each plant that you buy

in a nursery will grow to a mature size, which is the footprint that you will reserve for that plant in your landscape.

Putting it All Together

Take a look at your yard. Map out the shady, sunny, dry, wet and windy areas.

Make notes on how much space, both horizontal and vertical, is available in each area.

Think about the wildlife you would like to have, or better yet, just decide that you want as much wildlife as possible.

Then start reading some books that describe plants for Houston, such as [*Native Texas Plants*](#) by Sally and Andy Wasowski; [*Plants for Houston and the Gulf Coast*](#) by Howard Garrett; [*Year-Round Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Metro Houston*](#) by Bob Randall; and [*The Lazy Gardener's Guide*](#) by Brenda Smith. These books identify the environments in which the plants thrive, so write down those plants that match the environment in your yard. See how easy it is? Now plan a day or two to enjoy shopping for plants. Visit locally owned nurseries that stock plants especially well adapted for our climate, such as Buchanan's, Wabash, Another Place In Time, Joshua's, The Enchanted Forest, The Arbor Gate, and Teas.

Into the Future

Once you dig into the soil and place your treasures, water to help the roots get well established and become amazed when that first dragonfly lands on a Pickerel Weed or a Giant Swallowtail butterfly appears on an orange tree leaf.

Ray Sher is a gardening and permaculture instructor, vegetable and fruit garden consultant, and works his large intensive home vegetable, fruit and herb garden using organic methods. Contact him at RayInTheGarden@urbanharvest.org.

Urban Harvest produces this column. Learn about gardening classes, community and school gardens, farmers' markets, organic landscaping and more at www.urbanharvest.org.



Coreopsis and Indian blanket wildflowers provide a home to nature.