

# WILDLIFE HABITAT 101

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Watching wildlife in action can be fun, educational, and relaxing. Because wildlife has very basic needs, it is relatively easy to increase wildlife viewing opportunities on your property. Wildlife needs suitable habitat to survive. As people build homes, roads, fences, and commercial developments, suitable habitat for wildlife becomes fragmented. But no matter how much land you have, you can create habitat on your property and provide a refuge for wildlife. By providing the basic components of habitat, you will enhance your wildlife experience and improve the health of the natural community around you.

## What is Habitat?

Habitat is made up of four components: food, water, shelter, and space. The best way to provide **food** for wildlife is to keep a diverse amount of native vegetation on your property. Native forbs, shrubs, and trees appropriate for your region and elevation can be the best food source for many different types of animals. For instance, prickly pear in the desert ecosystems may attract desert tortoises, while plants that bear seeds and fruits may attract various small mammals and birds. Increased vegetation will likely increase the amount and diversity of insects, spiders and worms which are important food sources for other animals. By increasing the amount of small mammals and birds on your property you may also see more predators, like hawks, owls, or bobcats.

Clean **water** is another component of wildlife habitat and is necessary for drinking, bathing and reproduction. You can add water features like ponds, birdbaths, or fountains to increase available water sources. It is important, however, to clean and thoroughly dry small water features every few days to decrease chances of spreading diseases among wildlife populations. Animals also need proper **shelter** to hide from people, weather and predators and to raise their young. Maintaining a diversity of native vegetation not only provides food, but also shelter. A variety of plant species provides a multi-layered structure that can very



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Mule deer

easily provide cover and nesting sites. Trees, rocks, logs, shrubs, grasses, and even dead and dying vegetation are great cover for birds and other wildlife.

The last component of habitat is **space**. All animals need space to eat, drink, and reproduce. Some species, like the solitary mountain lion, require large amounts of space to search for prey.

Other species, like the kangaroo rat, may only roam 200-300 feet. Space requirements vary by species, age, and even season. Even if you have a small lot, you can provide essential space for wildlife. Animals may use your property as a corridor to get to other natural areas or you may be able to offer a larger habitat by getting your neighbors involved.

Natural areas are attractive to people and add interest, and even real estate value, to your property. Restoring and maintaining natural areas also comes with a multitude of environmental benefits. Clean water, better air quality, and soil protection are all part of the package when you conserve natural resources over the long term. In addition, natural areas are generally low maintenance because native plants

are adapted to your location, require less water, and are able to resist local pests and diseases, reducing the need for chemical pesticides. By keeping the footprint of your house and manicured areas to a minimum, you can contribute to a healthy landscape while cutting down on maintenance costs and time.

## Keeping Wildlife Wild

Attracting wildlife can sometimes create conflicts if a single species becomes too abundant or an unwanted visitor wanders onto your property. If a wild animal finds food consistently on your property in the form of garbage cans, seed, or pet food they will recognize your property as a food source and can cause conflicts with you or your pets. In order to reduce the chances of some wildlife becoming unwanted guests, it is best to only provide food in the form of native vegetation. Never feed wildlife directly. If you set out large seed blocks, like those used for quail, keep them at a great distance from your home and outbuildings as these can attract rodents and predators. Also, secure your garbage indoors or in wildlife-proof containers and always feed pets indoors.



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Secure your garbage in wildlife-proof containers.

## Backyard Habitat

You can increase enjoyment of your property by creating a refuge for wildlife. Enhancing native vegetation not only provides habitat essential for wildlife survival but is also beneficial to you and the environment. Wildlife needs are basic but vary depending on wildlife species. To find out more about individual species you are interested in attracting, see the resources below.

Enjoying Wild Birds in Your Backyard  
Tucson Audubon Society Nature Shop

Landscaping for Desert Wildlife  
[azgfd.com/w\\_c/urban\\_wildlife.shtml](http://azgfd.com/w_c/urban_wildlife.shtml)

Arizona Native Plant Society  
Native Plant and Seed Sources  
[aznps.org/sources.html](http://aznps.org/sources.html)

Maricopa County Cooperative Extension  
[ag.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/html/library/refanml.htm](http://ag.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/html/library/refanml.htm)

Arizona Partners for Fish and Wildlife  
[fws.gov/southwest/es/Arizona/partners.htm](http://fws.gov/southwest/es/Arizona/partners.htm)



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This information has been reviewed by university faculty.  
[cals.arizona.edu/pubs/natresources/az1481a.pdf](http://cals.arizona.edu/pubs/natresources/az1481a.pdf)

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