



Your All-Inclusive Guide to the Humane Backyard

Webinar Series Overview

This three-part series provides information key to creating a humane backyard. These top tips from an expert humane gardener will help you create an oasis for all animals in your beautiful, environmentally friendly landscape. Topics include the fundamentals of a humane backyard, alternatives to inhumane products and gardening practices, mindfulness of others who share our outdoor spaces with us, and plantings that attract birds, mammals, pollinators, and other insects critical to all life on our planet.



[All photos by Nancy Lawson/HumaneGardener.com, unless otherwise noted]

Part 1: Top Tips for Creating a Humane Backyard

The humane backyard concept promotes biodiversity and environmental sustainability. With a little effort, everyone can implement it. Don't worry about doing it all at once. Start small and expand as your time and budget allow. The animals will thank you!

Elements of a Humane Backyard



Why a Humane Backyard?

Animals and plants have evolved together for millennia. They have developed intricate relationships that affect life up and down the food web. For example, 96 percent of terrestrial birds in North America rely on insects, particularly caterpillars, to feed their young. Most of those insects, in turn, rely on the foliage of native plants for their very survival. That's why our plant selections for our gardens are so important.

In suburbia, much of the landscape is filled with non-life-supporting turfgrass (the no. 1 irrigated crop in the country). Turfgrass is drenched in tens of millions of pounds of chemicals and contributes to water pollution. The typical suburban lot has 90 percent less tree biomass than a natural woodlot provides. And too often, the few species we do plant offer little to no habitat for much of our wildlife. We can improve this by planting native trees and plants to restore balance.



Photo by: Krista Rakovan

From Caterpillars to Cats

Creating a humane backyard also means including a safe, fun spot for your dog and humanely confining your feline friends.

If you have a dog, spend a little time observing her outdoor habits before you landscape. You can help guide your dog by slightly raising the beds along a pathway or installing trellises. Leave spaces in shady spots where she can see you but feel safe in her own domain.

To keep both cats and wildlife safe, train your cats to walk and rest outside on a leash with you. Or build a “catio”—an outdoor cat enclosure—by retrofitting an existing porch or balcony or purchasing a kit to create one from scratch.

Part 2: The Mindful Gardener

Being a mindful gardener means nourishing biodiversity in your backyard and rethinking outdated labels such as “pests” and “weeds.” Insects typically labeled as “pests” often inspire gardeners to reach quickly for spray bottles filled with toxic chemicals. Many of these products—even some that are considered organic—kill not just the intended target but nearly everything else in their path.

A healthy garden is built on the principle that nature has a way of taking care of itself when allowed. For example, if you let the aphids be, soon enough the ladybugs will come along and eat them. But if you spray all the aphids away, what will the ladybugs have left to eat?

We can stop the madness and become more mindful gardeners by keeping these key principles in mind:

2. Inspect and protect. Don't be so quick to brush away the eggs and tents on your plants. They may just be butterflies in the making! Thinking beyond your first instinct will help you learn more about what's really transpiring in your garden.

4. Respect the ground you walk on. The soil beneath us is rich with life, as are fallen leaves, where butterflies and other insects take cover and birds love to feed.

1. Celebrate the holes in your leaves. It's a sign your garden is life-sustaining and supporting the insects that feed the birds and other animals.

3. Nature is the real gardener! Nourish biodiversity by planting diverse native plants—including perennials, trees, vines and shrubs.



Humane Design and Wildlife

When creating structures or implementing exclusion methods, think from an animal's perspective. For example, before mowing, check the area for turtles and rabbit nests. Be careful with garden netting, which can trap snakes. Consider using hedges for privacy instead of fences that can also trap and cause harm to animals. If you have a pond, create sloping sides to allow an escape route for fallen animals who can't climb out by themselves. Retrofit pools by adding ramps or floating attachments, available from online retailers.



Avoid conflict....

- Add fencing around gardens to protect them from nibbling.
- Tie a bungee cord around your trash can to discourage clever raccoons
- Bring your birdfeeder in at night to avoid attracting animals other than birds

Apply the same mentality to potential conflict with wildlife in your yard. By viewing the world from the eyes of other species, you can learn to creatively and humanely resolve conflicts with our backyard friends.

Part 3: Attracting Pollinators to your Garden

Over 85% of the world's flowering plants rely on pollinators for their production. In the U.S. alone, their value to agricultural crops has been estimated at anywhere from \$15 to \$30 billion per year! But their role in the overall ecosystem is priceless. To attract pollinators like bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles, and hummingbirds, check out these tips.

Plant straight species when available. Avoid double petaled and pollenless flowers.

Plant natives in clumps of at least five per species to attract pollinators. Use plants with a variety of shapes and colors.

Let them bask in the warmth. Damp salt licks and stones will make your backyard a spa!

Make a plan for all seasons, including flowering species that bloom in succession for migrating butterflies and hummingbirds.

Avoid pesticides, one of the biggest threats to pollinators.

Leave bare patches of soil for bees; most of our 4,000 native species nest on the ground or underneath. Leave perennial stalks for cavity-nesting bees and tree snags for beetles and birds.

We Give These Resources a Green Thumbs-Up

Humane Gardener offers tips and resources on how to build and sustain your humane backyard.

www.humanegardener.com

The Humane Society of the United States provides resources and articles for welcoming wildlife and humanely resolving conflicts with animals in your home and on your property.

http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/wild_neighbors/humane-backyard/humane-backyard.html

Wildflower.org, a website of the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center in Texas, provides a national database of native plant species.

www.wildflower.org

Wild Neighbors by HSUS senior scientist John Hadidian is about living in harmony with our backyard friends, providing advice for humanely excluding animals from structures and gardens.

Bringing Nature Home by Doug Tallamy explains how anyone can help sustain wildlife using native plants.