

Submitted by S. Kay Gandy, Ed. D.

Title: *Backyard Habitats*

Grade Level: 5-8

Overview:

This lesson introduces students to the concept that a habitat can be in their own backyards. In 1973, the Backyard Wildlife Habitat program was established in an effort to create an awareness of how land management can have major effects on wildlife. This program offers a certificate from the National Wildlife Federation for anyone who creates a habitat in a backyard, on a balcony, at a workplace, or in a schoolyard.

Connections to the Curriculum:

geography, science

Connections to the National Geography Standards:

Standard 8: the characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface

Standard 14: how human actions modify the physical environment

Time:

This project will continue throughout the year.

Materials Required:

- Internet connection
- Space to create a habitat

Objectives:

Students will:

- identify habitat elements that already exist in the planned space.
- provide the four basic requirements of wildlife survival (food, water, cover, and places to raise young).
- practice resource conservation in the habitat area (use mulch to conserve moisture and cut down weeding, eliminate chemical use, control pests by organic means).
- certify the habitat with the Backyard Wildlife program.

Geographic Skills:

Asking geographic questions

Acquiring geographic information

Organizing geographic information

Procedure:

1. Introduce the concept that a habitat is the place in which an animal or plant species lives. Explain how habitat loss is the number one threat to wildlife. The conversion of natural areas into landscapes has disturbed the balance of ecosystems and has resulted in drastic reduction of habitat and the disappearance

of many species of wildlife. Discuss human/environment interaction and how land management has affected wildlife.

2. Assess the space you are considering to be a habitat. List native and non-native plants. Which plants might provide food or nesting places? It is important to restore native plant communities to the area. Native plants require less fertilizer, water, pest control and maintenance than non-native plants. Contact the state or local plant society to find native species to your area. Websites that are helpful in identifying plants are <http://www.enature.com> and www.wildflower.org.
3. Examine water in the planned area to make sure it is available and unpolluted. Wildlife may need water for drinking, bathing, breeding or cover. Consider adding evergreen trees or shrubs to provide year-round protective cover. Logs and rocks also offer good cover or places to raise young. Use mulch to conserve soil moisture. Control pests by organic means. For instance, birds, bats, and ladybugs eat insects.
4. Everyone who provides the basic habitat elements (food, water, cover, and places to raise young) and who takes steps to conserve natural resources in their yard may apply for certification. Fill out an application for certification, attach photos or a sketch of your habitat area, and send to the National Wildlife Federation. Apply for certification at <http://www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/application.html>
If you plan the habitat in your schoolyard, apply for certification at http://www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats/pdfs/application_without_graphics_11-15-01.pdf

Suggested Student Assessment:

- student participation—documentation through
 - journal writings
 - photography
- completed project—group evaluation by using a three point rubric
 - **3 pts** completes all of assignment; careful preparation; group works well together; well-organized presentation
 - **2 pts** completes most of assignment, satisfactory preparation; group works well together most of the time; satisfactory presentation
 - **1 pt** completes little of assignment; careless preparation; group has problems working together; unorganized presentation

Extending the Lesson:

1. Visit www.greenscreen.org to learn about the Global Habitat project. The site includes lesson ideas for teachers, games and activities for students, and terrific links to other habitat sites.
2. Start a community project to create backyard habitats at homes of elderly community members and workplaces.

Resources:

National Wildlife Federation

<http://www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/>