

BACKYARD HABITATS: BUG HOTELS, BIRD FEEDERS, AND BUTTERFLY PUDDLERS

AGES

Children 6+ years

Teens

Multigenerational

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A backyard habitat series for birds and pollinators! This program teaches participants the basics of backyard habitats: Project options include a bug hotel, a bird feeder, and a butterfly puddler. Build one habitat, or run a series to build all three. Modify habitat designs based on audience age and the supplies you have on hand; see Resources for more design ideas. Suggested runtime: 90 minutes



Image source: Shutterstock

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION FOR BUG HOTELS

You will need:

- Recycled tin cans or plastic soda bottles
- Sticks, hollow bamboo, or bee tubes
- Leaves or pinecones
- Twine or string
- Something to punch holes in tin or plastic

Slice off the ends of recycled soda bottles, or remove the bottoms from tin cans. These will be used as outer wrappers for the bug hotels. During the program, participants bundle sticks into the cans or plastic bottle rounds. Punch holes in the plastic, and tie a string for hanging.

TIP:

Include a pollinator gardening component and give participants flower seedlings to take home and plant!

ADAPTATION:

For a fun twist, older children or teens could repurpose old Legos by turning them into bird feeder castles. Seed can be placed in a “moat” around the base.

ADAPTATION:

For younger children, pinecone bird feeders are an easy option. Tutorial here: <https://bit.ly/3dJpqMr>

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION FOR BIRD FEEDERS

You will need:

- Tin cans
- Craft sticks
- Paint and paint brushes
- String or twine
- Birdseed
- Small cups, soil, and flower seeds (optional)

Participants paint the outside of the cans and glue one craft stick for a perch. Punch holes and add string to hang.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION FOR BUTTERFLY PUDDLERS

- Pie tins or shallow dishes
- Sponges or flat river rocks
- Water and sugar (9:1 water to sugar ratio) or fresh fruit in water
- String or twine
- Decorative beads

Poke four evenly spaced holes around edge of the pie tin. Thread string through the holes, and add beads to the string for decoration. Tie all four strands together at the top, and add fruit or a sugar water mixture to attract butterflies.



Image source: Shutterstock

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION FOR BENEFICIAL PERENNIALS

You will need:

- Small cups with holes in the bottom or biodegradable pots
- Perennial seeds native to your area
- Soil (or peat pods for easier cleanup)

Start these before the program to make sure the seeds are viable, or let participants plant them themselves.

IMPORTANT:

Even in shallow dishes, butterflies need places to perch to drink the water, so remember the flat rocks or sponges.

SEEDY PERENNIALS TO ATTRACT BIRDS:

Alliums, sunflowers, coneflowers, poppies, cosmos, black-eyed Susans, etc.

SYRUPY PERENNIALS TO ATTRACT POLLINATORS:

Yarrow, bee balm, butterfly bush, lavender, nasturtiums, sage, hollyhocks, lupine, milkweed, etc.

TIP:

Be sure to choose non-invasive perennials for your area.

UNIQUE SPACE AND PERSONNEL NEEDS

One to three staff members depending on the size of your group/complexity of feeder design. You could also invite members of county or state agricultural extension offices to discuss local habitats and native plants. A good outdoor program.

RESOURCES

Web: General

Flowers for attracting pollinators: <https://bit.ly/365ePjv>

Attracting beneficial insects: <https://bit.ly/2zAvk3H>

Garden design tips from the National Wildlife Federation: <https://bit.ly/2LpQTXI>

Bird habitat basics: <https://bit.ly/2WSjv0S>

Web: Insect Hotels

Simple insect hotel tutorial: <https://bit.ly/2YVwcuA>

Insect hotels from UM Dearborn: <https://bit.ly/2WTYqDv>

Web: Bird Feeders

Pine cone bird feeders: <https://bit.ly/2TfU3Sf>

Tin can bird feeder: <https://bit.ly/2xTVkGS>

Craft stick bird feeder: <https://bit.ly/2WoaFZQ>

See Chapter 02: The Genius of Birds for more bird-related programming.

Web: Butterflies Puddlers

Butterfly puddler tutorial: <https://bit.ly/2zATyew>

Pie tin butterfly tutorial: <https://bit.ly/2Lm3bQy>

Bird and Pollinator Books

Picture Books

The Bee Book (2018) by Charlotte Milner (NF)

Common Critters: The Wildlife in Your Neighborhood (2020) by Pat Brisson and Dan Tavis (NF)

Crow Not Crow (2018) by Jane Yolen, Adam Stemple, and Elizabeth Dulemba (NF)

Hello, I'm Here! (2019) by Helen Frost and Rick Lieder (NF)

Save the Bees (2020) by Bethany Stahl (NF)

Early Readers

The Collectors (Cork and Fuzz #3) (2010) by Dori Chaconas and Lisa McCue (F)

The Real Poop on Pigeons (2019) by Kevin McCloskey (NF)

TIP:

Remember to check your county and state agricultural extension office websites for backyard gardening tips!

TIP:

For adult nonfiction, see Chapter 05: Backyard Animal Farming; for children's insect nonfiction, see Chapter 02: Creepy Crawlies.

CRAFT

Middle Grade

Coo (2020) by Kaela Noel (F)

Create Your Own Backyard Wildlife Habitat (2016) by Doris Dumrauf (2016) (NF)

The Girl Who Drew Butterflies: How Maria Merian's Art Changed Science (2018) by Joyce Sidman (NF)

Super Simple Backyard Projects: Fun and Easy Animal Environment Activities (2016) by Carolyn Bernhardt (NF)

The Triumphant Tale of the House Sparrow (2018) by Jan Thornhill (NF)

Wishtree (2017) by Katherine Applegate (F)