



ACTIVITY

Creating a Habitat Care Guide

Summary:

Participants create a guide for on-going care and maintenance of their habitat site.

Grade Level:

5-12

Time:

1-4 hours, depending on the number of plants and elements described in the guide and the number of participants contributing to its creation.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- ◆ Research and record the care needed for plants and other elements in their habitat.
- ◆ Create a written (or electronic) guide that clearly explains the care needed for plants and other elements in their habitat.
- ◆ Organize wildlife habitat information in a logical and creative manner.

Materials Needed:

- ◆ White or colored paper
- ◆ Construction paper
- ◆ Glue
- ◆ Scissors
- ◆ Stapler
- ◆ Pens and pencils
- ◆ Colored pencils, markers and crayons
- ◆ Plant/field guides
- ◆ Care instructions that accompanied the plants when purchased
- ◆ Pictures of plants, if available (these can also be drawn)

Background:

Wildlife habitat team members can pass on the knowledge they have gained about their site by creating a care guide. The guide is for the caretakers of the habitat, whether those caretakers are groundskeepers, other youth and teens, volunteers, or ultimately, a combination of these groups.

The basic sections of the guide include a habitat map, plant list, plant care instructions, and general and seasonal wildlife habitat site maintenance instructions. In addition to providing detailed instructions about caring for the wildlife habitat site, participants can also add their own creative touches to the guide, such as artwork, pictures of plants, before and after photos, a special note to the caretakers and even a dedication page.

Note: For a more formal habitat guide, use the same materials but consider having participants type the care instructions and insert graphics into the document.

What to Do:

1. Divide the participants into groups that correspond to each section of a habitat guide: Habitat Map, Plant List and Plant Care Instructions, General and Seasonal Maintenance, and Cover Design and

Acknowledgements. Given that a majority of the information will be contained in the Plant List and Plant Care Instructions section, this group should be the largest. If possible, have volunteers assist small groups.

2. Using field guides, care instructions that accompanied plants, and other related resources, have participants create a section of the Habitat Care Guide using the general guidelines below.

3. After they have completed their sections, have participants present their respective sections of the guide to the whole group. Review the information for accuracy and then, as a group, assemble the guide into a book.

4. Locate a suitable place for the book to be stored, e.g., in the facility library, front desk, in a weather-protected shelter near-by, etc.

5. Create a ceremony of presenting this book to a group leader or administrator for safekeeping and a sense of ownership.

Suggested Care Guide Sections:

Habitat Map:

Ask participants to draw a map of the wildlife habitat site to scale. The map should include which direction is north and any existing paths,





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buildings, trees and structures that are close the site. Using different colored pencils and symbols, they should mark the location of plants, trees, and shrubs, as well as any pathways, borders, benches, bird-houses or bird feeders. Participants can create a key that deciphers the symbols or they can label the symbols on the map.

Plant List & Plant Care

Instructions:

For each plant or flower on the habitat, groups should create a page or two that includes the following:

- **Plant Name:** common name and botanical name.
 - **Picture of Plant:** include the plant's leaves and bloom, if possible. Pictures of plants can be drawn, taken from magazines, catalogs, field guides, or the Internet. Small clippings of leaves and/or a petal can be included as well.
- Note: Make sure that all plants are well labeled in the habitat site.*
- **Description:** include height, spread, type of leaves, flower color and description, and the area to which it is native.
 - **Plant Care and Conditions:** a description of the care it needs (watering and pruning) and where it grows best (soil type and sun needs).

General & Seasonal Habitat Maintenance:

Participants will need to provide a description of the general and seasonal maintenance that the habitat site needs. The type of care needed will vary, depending on the region of the country and the plant types found in the wildlife habitat site. Information about these needs is regional. The general description should include a summary of the basic watering, weeding, mulching, and fertilizing (if necessary) that the habitat will need, and when it may need it. This information can be obtained from a nursery or garden center at time of plant purchase or can be obtained from local native plant societies, gardening clubs, or agricultural extension offices.

Depending on the density of the site planting and expectations of the property owners, a wildlife habitat site may become fairly self-sufficient. However, a wildlife habitat maintainer should observe the following important practices:



- Weed the site until plants mature (includes removing any exotic invasive plants in the area if possible).
- Water plants periodically for a full growing season, until they are established.
- Re-apply mulch at least once a year (or as needed) until plants are established. Leave natural leaf-litter where it falls.

Regardless of the region, wildlife habitat sites will go through a dormant period, usually in the winter. A habitat site does not benefit from the traditional practice of removing or cutting back perennials, grasses, fruiting trees, and shrubs in the dormant months. Leave plants standing to provide seeds, fruit, and stems for wildlife that remain in the area. The plants will also provide cover from harsh winter elements. In addition, keep any bird feeders in the habitat filled during this dormant period and provide a clean water source.

Cover Design and Acknowledgements:

Participants can be creative in the design of the wildlife habitat site care guide. Collages, hand-drawn pictures or sketches can adorn the cover, along with a title they create. The acknowledgement page should include the names of all of those who helped create the wildlife habitat, as well as those who donated materials, space, plants, or time to





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the project. If appropriate, participants may want to name a specific person or place to whom/which the wildlife habitat site is dedicated.

For Younger Participants (Grades K-4):

Have younger participants create a simplified scrapbook with drawings and pictures of the plants, the work in progress, and the final product. Assist them with labeling their artwork and photos.

Questions:

- How will our habitat site be maintained?
- What information can we pass along to others who may use it?
- How can we best organize and present this information?

Adaptations:

Refer to general adaptations on pages 11-16.

Hearing Disabilities:

- Allow participants who have difficulty speaking to utilize the sign language interpreter for their small group work and making presentations. Encourage all participants to write down comments and questions in their small groups to ensure effective communication.

Learning/Cognitive Disabilities:

- Have simplified versions of resources available as needed, including field guides with large colored pictures.
- Have partners assist participants with reading and writing tasks as needed.
- Have participants who have difficulty writing dictate information for the guide. They can also draw or cut out pictures for the guide.
- If desired, have plant and garden element labels made ahead of time. Consider having participants cut and dry leaves from featured plants for the plant identification section. Have wildlife stickers available to help decorate the guide.

Motor Disabilities:

For participants with limited muscle strength, coordination, or dexterity of the hands:

- Build up the handles of pencils or markers with bandage material or foam as needed. Use large crayons for younger participants.
- Have participants who have difficulty writing dictate information for the guide. They can also draw or cut out pictures for the guide. If desired, have plant and garden element labels made ahead of time. Consider having participants cut and dry leaves from featured plants for the plant identification section. Have wildlife stickers available to help decorate the guide.

- Have adaptive scissors and large glue sticks available.

Visual Disabilities:

Overall:

- If possible, have resources available in alternative formats including large print, Braille, and audio cassette.

For participants with low vision:

- Use large-sized paper to make a large print guide. If possible, have participants complete the text on a computer in 18 or 20-point font.
- Use a scrapbook or large-sized binder to create the project.

For participants who are blind:

- Use a three-ring binder to create the project. Have participants make section tabs and label them in Braille.
- If possible, have participants create the text on a Braille writer or computer program.
- Have participants cut and dry leaves from featured plants for the plant identification section. If desired, you can cut leaves and flowers out of fabric (e.g., corduroy, felt, etc.) to make a tactile interpretive guide.
- Have participants create the base map in different textures (e.g., rice, beans, fabric, etc.) and label it in Braille.

