



Planting Your Wildlife Habitat Site

ACTIVITY

Background:

After weeks of researching, planning, and preparing it is now time for the real fun—planting the habitat! Participants will be thrilled to see their plans become an actual wildlife habitat.

While there are general planting guidelines to follow, each plant is unique. Most plants, seeds, and bulbs come with suggested planting depths and spacing measurements, as well as sun and soil requirements. If this information is not provided, ask the nursery staff for planting suggestions.

When planting, keep in mind the size of each plant at maturity. At the same time, it is important to remember that things grow closer in nature and often grow in clusters, so do not be afraid to group plants together to form tight-knit communities. If large gaps are left between plants, nature will fill them in, often with unwanted invasives that can take over the habitat. Spacing decisions should be made prior to the day of planting.

What to Do:

1. Gather all required equipment. Plants should be purchased ahead of time. If possible, take the group on a field trip to a nursery to purchase the plants. The site should al-

ready be prepped; see “Breaking New Ground” for complete details.

Review the site design plan for the habitat with the group, including what plants go where. Go over general planting instructions (e.g., hole size, watering, mulching, etc.). Consider planting a shrub or plant as a demonstration. Review tool and safety issues as needed.

2. Divide participants into groups, assigning each group a certain area of the habitat to plant. If possible, assign a volunteer to assist each group. Give the participants area/plant specific instructions including how far apart plants should be spaced.

3. Begin planting. Remember, enthusiasm is contagious, so have a great time digging in the dirt!

4. Have participants label plant markers (available at nurseries and garden centers) in permanent ink. Place in appropriate spots throughout the habitat to identify plants and educate visitors. Following the site design plan, have participants place additional elements in the habitat (e.g., benches, bird feeders, etc.).

Note: Have water, sunscreen, and a first aid kit available. Take appropriate rest breaks.

Summary:

Participants plant their selected vegetation on the habitat site.

Grade Level:

K-12

Time:

2 to 6 hours or more, depending on size of habitat and number of participants

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- ◆ Demonstrate basic proper planting techniques and requirements.
- ◆ Place appropriate plants in their new habitat site, according to their site plan.

Materials Needed:

- ◆ Gardening gloves
- ◆ Shovels
- ◆ Rakes
- ◆ Hand trowels
- ◆ Water source (hose, watering can, etc.)
- ◆ Buckets
- ◆ Plants (i.e., trees, flowers, shrubs, seeds, etc.)
- ◆ Tree protectors (if planting seedlings)
- ◆ Mulch
- ◆ Compost or other organic material
- ◆ Plant markers and a permanent marker





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Planting Guidelines:

Plants and Shrubs:

Dig a hole the same depth and slightly wider than the container the plant came in. Remove the plant from its container and gently loosen the roots. Place in the hole and cover with backfill (soil from the hole). Gently pat down the soil to be sure there are no large air pockets; water, and apply mulch.

Trees:

Dig a hole twice as wide and no deeper than the container the tree came in, or the height of its rootball. Remove the tree from its container or burlap wrap. Gently loosen the roots and place in the hole. Water for several minutes. Fill in the hole with backfill, pat down the soil and apply mulch. Be careful not to pile mulch around the tree trunk, as this traps heat and moisture and can cause the bark to rot. Use a tree protector (available at nurseries or through gardening catalogs) when planting seedlings. This will protect small trees from errant lawn mowers and hungry deer.

Bulbs and Seeds:

- Refer to planting directions on packaging; water, and mulch. If desired, start seeds several weeks in advance as an additional activity for participants.



Soil:

- If the soil is in poor condition in the area, mix some organic material such as compost in with the backfill. Be sure to match plant needs with soil conditions. Adding soil amendments can slightly alter the soil quality, but the basic needs of a plant must be met by the existing soil for the plant to thrive.

Watering:

- Apply water generously, making sure to reach the roots and not just moistening the surface. After the initial planting, water approximately once a week with 1 inch of water, although amount will vary with weather conditions and soil type. If possible, water with a soaker hose or other drip irrigation system. Native plants will require watering periodically for a full growing season to help them become fully established. Once established, they should not require watering except in times of extreme drought.

Mulching:

- Apply at least a 1 inch layer of mulch to the soil surface. There are a variety of mulches available including wood chip, leaf, and pine needle. Use what is readily available and fits the project budget. Not only does mulch look attractive, it helps hold in moisture, adds nutrients, and helps cut down on weed growth.

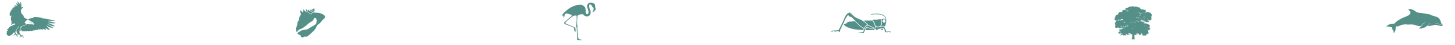
Adaptations:

Refer to general adaptations on pages 11-16.

Hearing Disabilities:

- Label each tool. After you demonstrate, have participants practice using tools in an open space prior to starting digging.
- Do an actual demonstration of each of the tasks you assign a group. Ask questions to assure that participants understand the task at hand.
- Clearly mark a perimeter boundary with flags or rope.
- Ensure that participants are adequately spaced for safety purposes.
- Use a flag or other visual symbol to indicate rest breaks or information briefs.
- Position yourself and the sign language interpreter so the participants can see you for further directions or warnings while in the field. Check in with participants periodically.





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Learning/Cognitive Disabilities:

- Label each tool; use different colored dots for participants who have difficulty reading. After you demonstrate, have participants practice using tools in an open space prior to starting digging.
- Do an actual demonstration of each of the tasks you assign a group. Ask questions to assure that participants understand the task at hand.
- Clearly mark a perimeter boundary with flags or rope.
- Ensure that participants are adequately spaced for safety purposes.
- Position yourself and any volunteers so the participants can see you for further directions or warnings while in the field. Check in with participants periodically.
- Use large-sized plant markers; if possible, have participants secure pictures of the plants on the markers in addition to writing their names (pictures often come with plants when purchased).

Motor Disabilities:

Overall:

- Select a site that is largely accessible.
- If possible, have adaptive gardening tools available. You can also use simple household items such as ice cream scoops or long handled spoons, or build up the handles of tools with

tape or bandage materials as needed.

- Ensure that participants are adequately spaced for safety purposes.
- Allow participants who are comfortable to work at ground level. If possible, provide a tarp for participants to sit on.
- Allow participants to work on preparing any raised beds, planting boxes, or containers in the habitat.
- Provide bags or aprons with pockets to assist participants with carrying items.

Visual Disabilities:

Overall:

- Clearly mark a perimeter boundary with a guide string.
- Use volunteers to promote safety, assist participants, and fully engage them in the activity.
- Give each participant and their partner adequate space to work for safety purposes.
- If your site is large, use a whistle to signify rest breaks or warnings.
- Allow participants who are comfortable to work at ground level. If possible, provide a tarp for participants to sit on.
- Position yourself and any volunteers so you can see the participants to ensure safety and make sure that all participants are actively engaged in the activity. Check in with participants periodically.
- Use large-sized plant markers that

can be labeled in both large print with a permanent black marker and adhesive Braille labels.

For participants with low vision:

- Paint or tape the handles of garden tools a bright color such as yellow to provide contrast to the grass and soil.

For participants who are blind:

- Give participants adequate space to work at the ground level. Have partners provide orientation directions for safety.
- Consider having a practice session before hand for participants who have no gardening experience.
- Allow participants to work on preparing any raised beds, planting boxes, or containers in the habitat.

