

What is Backyard Stewardship?

We can restore and protect the environment one backyard at a time! This guide is a starting point for you and your family.

Suburban development has replaced millions of acres of habitat in the state, resulting in a loss of the many important services these natural areas once provided in maintaining pollinators and other wildlife, capturing and filtering stormwater, and cleaning the air by taking in carbon. By being a backyard steward, each of us can bring back the ecological value of our gardens, lawns and landscaping, and woodlands – collectively this can make a big difference for people, wildlife, and our streams and rivers. It can also save money in the end as native plants require less water and maintenance.

✿ A few key rules of good stewardship to apply throughout your backyard:

- Native plants are the way to go
- Plant diversity = wildlife diversity
- Remove non-native invasive plants
- We need more trees
- Buffers protect streams and wetlands
- Cut down or cut out use of chemicals

Resources

For more information on how to be a better backyard steward visit:

Raritan Headwaters Association
www.raritanheadwaters.org/learning-resource-hub/

Raritan Valley Community College Center for Environmental Studies
www.raritanval.edu/Environmental-Studies

Rutgers Water Resources Program (Rain Gardens)
water.rutgers.edu/Projects/Projects.htm

Jersey Friendly Yards jerseyyards.org

The National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat Resources: www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Create/At-Home

New Jersey Native Plant Society www.npsnj.org/

The New Jersey Invasive Strike Team
www.fohvos.info/invasive-species-strike-team/

Raritan Headwaters (RHA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit conservation organization founded in 1959 to engage New Jersey residents in safeguarding water and natural ecosystems. As one of the largest watershed associations in New Jersey, RHA works with partners to protect, preserve and improve water quality and other natural resources of the Upper Raritan River region and beyond.
www.raritanheadwaters.org

Raritan Headwaters Guide to Backyard Stewardship



Woodlands, Streams & Wetlands

Over 62% of New Jersey's forested land is privately owned, leaving it up to land owners to protect and preserve these ecosystems. Forests provide clean water in streams and aquifers, sequester carbon and help to mitigate climate change, and provide habitat for biodiversity.

✿ If you have a woodland on your property:

- Maintain a diversity of native trees and shrubs; actively plant trees and install deer protection
- Remove non-native vines such as Bittersweet and Wisteria from trees
- Manually remove non-native trees and shrubs such as Ailanthus, Japanese barberry, wineberry
- Leave snags (standing dead trees) and fallen logs in place
- Maintain a "rough edge" (less manicured area) of native shrubs and young trees along your woodland to protect the interior of the woods.
- Look out for invasive pests and diseases

✿ If you have a stream or wetland:

- Maintain an undisturbed forested buffer
- Follow state and local regulations on buffer width; stream buffers in the region must be either 150 ft. or 300 ft.

Gardens

Flower gardens are not only beautiful – when gardening with native plants, they also provide habitat and resources for pollinators and birds, require less watering and fertilizers, and can be designed as “rain gardens” to capture and filter runoff from storms and keep pollution out of our waterways.



✿ Rain gardens are strategically placed and designed gardens that capture and filter rain water from roofs, patios, pavement and lawn using stones, soil and native plants. They serve the functions of preventing stormwater runoff from entering streams, recharging aquifers, and providing pollinator habitat.

Lawns & Landscaping

Lawns and landscaping are a dominant feature of yards in suburban areas– there is much room for improved stewardship in these areas.

Lawns are often monocultures of just a few non-native turf grass species that require a lot of watering, weed control, and fertilizers.

✿ Some alternatives:

- Reduce the area of lawn
- Replace turf with native grasses
- Allow your lawn to become more diverse
- Mow less often and at a suitable height
- Leave clippings in place as mulch
- Do a soil test before deciding on amendments; use only organic fertilizers if any at all
- Avoid herbicides and other pesticides
- Water less frequently

✿ Other eco-friendly landscape practices:

- Plant native shrubs and trees to provide shade, clean the air, prevent erosion and provide food and nesting habitat for wildlife; include fruit-bearing trees and shrubs
- Check with your municipality about tree removal permits; replace trees you remove with another native tree
- Place a birdbath in your yard as a water source for wildlife
- Install a rain barrel to capture rain water to use for watering the garden