

Gardening for Local Wildlife

By Sandra Gray, Fort Bend Master Gardener

Insects, birds, frogs, bats, snakes, and more — oh, my! There are so many critters that we want and need to protect. Some we prize for their beauty, some are important to the pollination of the plants we love, and some eat pests we don't want (I'm looking at you, mosquitoes!). To protect all of these, we need to create an environment for wildlife. One way to do this is to plant a diversity of native plants that help feed our native wildlife. Learn more about [creating an environment for wildlife](#).



Mockingbird, Texas State Bird

A well-manicured lawn may impress some neighbors but your local wildlife prefers a more diverse habitat.

Choosing a variety of plants will help ensure your local fauna have an opportunity to find something that will please them. You may be more successful attracting wildlife if you make your yard a little wild with plants of different sizes, shapes, and heights. Learn more about this [Earth-Kind® principle](#).

Scientists estimate as much as 75% of all crops depend on pollinators, such as birds, insects, bats, and even some mammals. Your own little backyard garden will benefit from them, too. To attract a variety of pollinators, you need to have flowers that bloom in different seasons (you probably want multi-season color anyway), have different bloom shapes and colors, and have some fragrance.

For any type of native animal, it is important to reduce your use of herbicides and pesticides. More information about some of the common animals that gardeners try to attract can be found below.



Bees

When most people picture bees, they think of bee hives. In fact, most native bees are solitary and do not live in a hive. However, whether they live in hives or in underground nests, your flowers need pollination and bees are important helpers with that. For more information about saving bees, read this [bee information](#). Texas A&M has a [list of plants that attract bees](#).

Butterflies and Moths

Butterflies and moths need plants for nectar, plants for their eggs and larvae (caterpillars), water, and places where they can have protection from the elements. The tricky part is a butterfly may need different plants for different stages of development. So, you might want to include a woody shrub where they can shelter when needed, a flowering plant for its nectar, a [plant for the larval stage](#) (which varies by species), and a some shallow water to attract the species of your choice. Also, consider the colors of your blooms. While butterflies might prefer reds, yellows, and oranges, moths are active at night and prefer whites and light blues and purples, which are easier to see in the dark. More information is available [here](#). Many [Texas Superstar plants](#) are also known to attract butterflies.



Monarch Butterfly, Texas State Insect

Hummingbirds



Texas has both native and migrating hummingbirds. Hummers are known to prefer red and orange blossoms with tubular shapes. Make sure to have plants that bloom at different times of the year so you can appeal to these local avian jewels throughout the year around and the travelers as they go through. The Audubon Society provides this [information about hummingbirds](#). Here is a [list of plants that attract hummingbirds](#).

Birds

Birds need food, water, nesting places, and shelter from predators. A variety of shrubs and trees will help provide the nesting location and shelter; plants with nectar, seeds, and/or berries will help provide food to many birds. Attracting insects will help feed other birds. Add a water source or birdbath and you will have plenty of birds to enjoy. More information about attracting birds is provided [here](#).

Bats

Bats are the only mammals to truly have the ability to fly. You might want to attract bats because of their consumption of insects. However, they are also known to pollinate plants. Like moths, bats hunt at night so, include some white, light blue, or light purple blossoms in your landscape to attract them. For more information of bats, read this [bat information](#).