



# HOW TO DESIGN A WILD BACK YARD

Creating a Wild Back Yard may be a challenge if you do not know where to start. This outline demonstrates one way to go from what currently exists in your yard to a Wild Back Yard.

## **STEP 1: Spatial Constraints – Define Your Area**

- Check your property boundaries or the boundaries of an adopted Wild Back Yard to know where you can and cannot make changes.
- Make a sketch mapping the outer boundaries of your Wild Back Yard.

## **STEP 2: Legal Constraints – Define Disallowed Actions**

- Before taking action, it's important to check local ordinances, HOA rules and regulations, the Ohio Revised Code, and easements for any Rights-of-Way to know which changes you may or may not be allowed to make in your Wild Back Yard.
- Consider drawing legal boundaries on a map of your Wild Back Yard.

## **STEP 3: Personal Constraints – Define Human Use Areas**

- Set realistic goals for your Wild Back Yard based on your physical and financial constraints and areas for which you may have an alternate use (e.g., a vegetable garden).
- Make a sketch of areas you want to change and areas you want to maintain in your Wild Back Yard.

## **STEP 4: Environmental Constraints**

- Evaluate the existing landscape.
  - What is the existing vegetation like (e.g., landscape bed, meadow, scrub-shrub, forest, etc.)?
  - What is the soil texture?
  - What is the topography (and where does your water drain)?
  - What is the soil moisture?
  - What are the soil nutrients?
  - How much sunlight does the area get?
- Sketch important site characteristics on a map of your Wild Back Yard.

## **STEP 5: Setting Goals for Your Wild Back Yard Vision**

- Determine goals for your Wild Back Yard, such as:
  - Increase structural diversity (i.e., having multiple layers like canopy, subcanopy, shrub, vine, groundcover, etc.)
  - Reduce yard maintenance
  - Provide habitat for a specific organism or group of organisms in your landscape (e.g., monarch butterflies, pollinators, five-lined skinks, amphibians, etc.)
  - Connect adjacent habitats
  - Restore soils
  - Eliminate invasive species
- Write down your goals.
- Establish a timeline to accomplish your goals.
- Establish a yearly budget.



### **STEP 6: Choosing a Style for Your Wild Back Yard**

- Naturalization
  - Boost biodiversity
  - Extend existing habitat
- Dynamic native landscape
- Manicured native landscape
  - Native container garden

### **STEP 7: Gathering Information**

- Know the plants you have and the plants you want.
- Find native plant sources.
- Determine which method(s) you will use to control non-native plants.
- Determine which method(s) you will use to install native plants.

### **STEP 8: Avoid Common Mistakes**

- Do not assume that a plant is native without double-checking the scientific name against an appropriate reference.
- Do not assume that ‘letting things go’ will result in valuable habitat.
- Do not assume that everything is non-native and needs to be replaced.
- Do not install a habitat feature that will create problems for you in the future.
- Do not install artificial habitat features if the natural habitat exists in your Wild Back Yard.

### **STEP 9: Design Your Space**

- Draw areas for applicable Wild Back Yards features on your map. For dynamic/rustic native and manicured native landscapes, it may be helpful to draw out a plan at higher resolution, to show placement of individual species.
  - Forested naturalization
  - Scrub-shrub naturalization
  - Meadow/prairie naturalization
  - Forested wetland naturalization
  - Emergent marsh naturalization
  - Pond or other water feature
  - Rain garden
  - Rock pile/brush pile
  - Dynamic/rustic landscape
  - Manicured native landscape
  - Native container garden

### **STEP 10: Implementation**

- Follow the timeline you established and implement your Wild Back Yard vision. Remember, creating a Wild Back Yards space can take several years, so don’t be discouraged and work in small steps when necessary.



***Scan the code for the complete guide!***