



# Gardening for the greater good

## Lending a helping hand to our Canadian species at risk

Story and photos by Sherry Hayes

Summer has arrived and avid gardeners are becoming active outdoors. From flower and veggie gardens to container and pond plantings, every gardener has a favourite style. This year, when garden planning, why not lend a helping hand to those special at-risk species that grace our great country.

The monarch butterfly is an at-risk species that inhabits most provinces in Canada. Still, with this expansive territory, its yearly multi-generational life cycles are fraught with difficulties due in part to pesticides and milkweed destruction, the only host plant for this species and the only thing caterpillars can eat. While natural habitats are most ideal, we can provide food sources necessary to help the species thrive.

Canada is often where the season's final generation is born. Aptly named the 'super generation', it requires strength, resilience and determination to make it through its long, epic journey to its warmer winter resting place in Mexico. Let's do our part for its survival.

### Coast to coast to coast

From delicate southern region insects to northern land mammals and from east coast shorebirds to west coast forest dwellers, vulnerable wildlife is worth our efforts to keep populations safe, healthy and thriving. The smallest of positive steps can have the greatest impact.

While many endangered species are rarely seen, for those that travel

through or take up residence in urban, suburban or countryside neighbourhoods, there are specific plants that may attract certain species. Bees require pollen. Dragonflies, frogs, birds and bats need insects to sustain them. A well-rounded backyard setting could ultimately create a natural food chain.

Every province has their specific list of endangered species. Check for those that overlap with your region. Typical species that intersect with built-up areas: butterflies, dragonflies, frogs, toads, snakes, rusty patch bumble bees, bats and birds such as swallows.

### Areas beyond urban and suburban

There are generally no borders for wildlife. They inhabit swaths of land where their wings, legs or bellies can navigate. At-risk species find permanent residence or migrate through, over and around lakes, ponds, sandy or muddy beaches and shorelines, wetlands, grasslands, meadows and forests.

Whether residential areas are in the countryside, forested areas or cottage country, native and migrating species find their way instinctively. When housing impedes their natural habitat or migratory paths, it is up to us to accommodate their rightful needs.

### Bringing wild creatures into backyards

Start with a detailed design plan. Proper planning is the first step to success. Consider at-risk species native to your area and those migrating through at specific times of the year.

Determine plants and other elements that could provide a tantalizing smorgasbord and haven for these special creatures. And remember, it takes time for gardens to mature and entice wildlife, however, attention to detail and dedication can reap wonderful results.

### Simple as 1, 2, 3...

**1. Plants:** Every plant has a purpose beyond its natural beauty. Some provide food while others provide shelter or nesting opportunities. Research and choose plants for at-risk species.

**2. Water:** Generally required for most species, whether to quench thirst, lay eggs or live in, a supply of clean water will be welcoming for wildlife.

**3. Shelter:** From evergreen or deciduous trees and shrubs to dry or moist soil, shelter is essential to attract wildlife as it generally equates to safety and is therefore critical for survival of at-risk species.

### Easy plant choices

Start with more common plants when beginning the process. For example, if monarch butterflies are known in your area, try milkweed, goldenrod, coneflower, New England aster, black-eyed Susan and annual zinnia. For the rusty patch bumblebee, consider sunflower, aster, goldenrod, bee balm and Joe Pye weed.

### Choose plants carefully

Before designing gardens or choosing plants, contact reliable sources to verify the zone for your specific area. This should determine plant viability. Correctly chosen plants should thrive

when placed appropriately.

Check with local and provincial governments to confirm any mandated restrictions on plants that may be considered invasive or banned in your area.

Always use appropriate caution regarding wildlife and plants. Be aware of allergies, reactions or other health issues. Do not physically engage with wild creatures. Our health is important and risks should never be taken in the pursuit of helping wildlife, even those at-risk.

### Do no harm!

Be cognizant of potential issues when creating gardens, especially when attempting to attract wildlife to your property. Fully research plants and all items before incorporating any into gardens or using on your property.

**Avoid chemicals:** Chemical-free gardens and lawns are key for keeping your winged, walking or slithering friends healthy and safe. Know what is entering your lawn, soil and plant systems. Lack of knowledge could have deadly consequences for both wild and domestic life. Whenever possible depend solely on quality soil, organics, clean mulch, water and sunshine. Healthy plants attract wildlife. Create a safe and healthy haven for all species.

**Simple solutions:** Hand pick weeds as they appear and before they establish a solid root system. Water selectively rather than broad spray coverage. To control waste, water the base or root system of the plant only.

### Leave nature in its place

Never remove native plants from their existing locations in the wild. It does more harm than good as the inhabitants of that area or those migrating through could potentially find their food sources disrupted. Use only plants that are readily available through reputable nurseries or garden centres.

### Be a good steward

Gardening is an enjoyable hobby as is wildlife watching. Take time to help at-risk species that frequent your area. Plan ahead for future years. Discover those that could benefit from a helping hand. A good selection of preferred plants along with water and shelter, all strategically placed, may just have some endangered species finding your backyard their home.

Nature is beckoning. Become a gardener for the greater good! Whether you reside in urban, suburban,

country, lakeside or forested regions, be a good steward of the land. Our fragile endangered species will be grateful you did! 🌱

*Sherry Hayes of Stoney Creek, Ontario is an award-winning Professional Landscape Designer and a fine artist. For her latest paintings, her Darkness series, she has committed to donating 100 percent of net proceeds of certain paintings to organizations devoted to preservation of endangered species and spaces.*

*For more garden design or art information, contact Sherry at [www.landscapingwithstyle.on.ca](http://www.landscapingwithstyle.on.ca) or [www.artscapesbyserry.ca](http://www.artscapesbyserry.ca)*



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