

BLUFF BEAUTIFICATION



Native Gardening-Creating Your Own “Certified Wildlife Habitat”

By Stephen Sutton

Did you know that our local Beautiful Long Beach Lawn to Garden (L2G) program provides incentives to help you? There are many nature lovers who continue to wonder what they can do on a hyper-local level to help our wildlife thrive. The answer is simple: **create your own native garden** in whatever space (or container) you may have. Habitats for birds, bees, butterflies, and other animals have become increasingly scarce due to the detrimental effects of urbanization and human-induced climate change. In fact, a 2019 report in the journal *Science* indicated that there are 2.9 billion fewer breeding birds in the U.S. and Canada than there were 5 decades ago—a 30 percent decrease. In addition, in 2022, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) declared the beloved monarch butterfly endangered and added it to the Red List of Threatened Species.

The simplest way to make an impact is replacing (or adding) native plants to your garden or patio and ensuring that birds and bees have a fresh source of water (a fountain is a wonderful feature). Native plants provide food for pollination and shelter for many species. Some of our Bluff Heights neighbors have heeded the call by planting native California milkweed varieties to help the monarchs. These plants have nurtured countless bees, hummingbirds, moths, and other flying insects.

Native plants are critical due to the timing of their bloom cycles, which birds and insects rely on for food. Tropical milkweeds (versus native varieties) can actually do more harm than good since the butterfly may be tempted to lay eggs during the wrong season or in the midst of migration, reducing the larvae's chances of survival. Many Long Beach nurseries feature California natives, and if you're up for a little field trip, there are some wonderful nurseries such as the Theodore Payne Foundation in San Fernando Valley to consider.

The National Wildlife Federation has a multitude of online resources for individuals as well as a Community Wildlife Habitat program, which gets the entire neighborhood involved. Most programs require that your habitat supports wildlife in three essential ways:

1. Providing a variety of native plant species for food, shelter, and places to raise young.
2. Supplying a fresh source of water, essential for all insects and animals. This can be as elaborate as a fountain or as simple as a saucer or bowl that's refreshed daily (preventing mosquitos from breeding).
3. Emphasizing sustainable practices such as conserving water, composting (to minimize artificial fertilizers), and eliminating pesticides while relying more on beneficial insects and organic methods.

One of the newest and largest of these Certified Wildlife Habitat communities is Los Angeles. Despite ample concrete and a sprawling freeway system, the Southland is known to be one of the most biologically diverse hotspots in the world, with more than 4,000 native plant and animal species. There are now more than 1,000 certified habitats here in L.A. county!

If you'd like to learn more about gardening for wildlife, visit www.GardenforWildlife.com, where you can order perennials and shrubs that are native to your area and curated to attract wildlife. You can also visit www.nwf.org to learn about certifying your own yard. You can also reach out to me or any “bee-friendly” neighbor who will no doubt be eager to assist you in your efforts.

Born and raised in the Heartland and a graduate of Indiana University, Stephen has spent the majority of his adult life living in Bluff Heights. Spending more than three decades as a successful sales and marketing executive, he now enjoys a successful real estate career while staying active with gardening, cooking, local volunteer efforts and walking his dog Winter. Stephen also loves escaping to his mountain property, where he serves on the Board of Directors for the Idyllwild Garden Club and Friends of San Jacinto Mountain County Parks.