

GARDENING

Wildlife Gardening and Plant Selection

by Craig Huegel

Gardening for wildlife is not equivalent to "attracting" wildlife. The latter approach often relies on feeders and fails to consider habitat. Without habitat, we can hope to attract only those animals that live nearby and this will greatly limit our effectiveness. By using the habitat approach, we can design our landscapes for the wildlife that we most want to live near us. Our landscape will then support reproducing wildlife. Understanding the concepts of habitat can ensure that a diversity of wildlife will survive in developed areas of Florida.

Our plant selections and landscape design will be the major determining forces in the types and diversity of wildlife habitat needs. We will want to direct our landscapes to provide habitat conditions for the wildlife that we most desire. Plants differ in their ability to provide food and cover. Various factors need to be considered, including foliage and branch characteristics, and the size, timing, and nature of fruit production. Plants need to be critically evaluated for their wildlife value, plant species need to be more diverse than are typically used, and our landscape designs need more creativity.

Craig Huegel is the manager of Brooker Creek Preserve, Pinellas County. He was the Urban Wildlife Extension Specialist for the University of Florida from 1987-92. He is chair of the Education Committee for the FNPS and author of Butterfly Gardening with Florida's Native Plants (published by FNPS) and of numerous articles on wildlife gardening. His new book, Florida Plants for Wildlife, will be published by FNPS in early 1995.