

Naturalizing Your Yard: A Friendly Guide to Embracing Nature

If you're looking to transform your yard into a haven for wildlife, you're not alone. Many homeowners are shifting from traditional lawns to naturalized landscapes that support biodiversity, conserve resources, and engage in sustainable land stewardship.

Why the Lawn Is a Colonial Legacy

The widespread use of grass lawns in Ontario dates back to colonial times when European settlers imposed their agricultural practices on the land. These manicured expanses were symbols of wealth and control, often replacing diverse ecosystems with monocultures. In contrast, Indigenous peoples maintained rich, biodiverse landscapes that supported a variety of plants and animals. By naturalizing our yards, we can begin to undo this legacy and restore ecological balance.

Let the Leaves Be

One of the simplest ways to support local wildlife is by leaving fallen leaves in your yard. Instead of bagging them up, rake them into garden beds or leave them in place. This practice provides essential habitat for pollinators like bees and butterflies, which often overwinter in leaf litter. Additionally, decomposing leaves enrich the soil with nutrients and help retain moisture. As noted by experts, "leaves are habitat, not trash" [xerces.org](https://www.xerces.org/).

Embrace Old Stumps and Dead Wood

Old tree stumps and dead wood are often seen as eyesores, but they play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity. These natural features provide nesting sites for cavity-nesting bees and serve as habitats for various insects and fungi. Rather than removing them, consider leaving them in place or incorporating them into your garden design. This approach not only supports wildlife but also adds a rustic charm to your landscape.

Plant for Pollinators

Creating a pollinator-friendly garden is an effective way to support local ecosystems. In Ontario, native plants are particularly beneficial as they provide the nectar and pollen that local pollinators depend on. Some excellent choices include:

- **Swamp Milkweed** – Attracts monarch butterflies.
- **Wild Bergamot** – Favoured by bees and hummingbirds.
- **Black-eyed Susan** – A hardy plant that supports various pollinators.
- **Purple Coneflower** – Known for its resilience and appeal to pollinators.

For a more structured approach, consider the "3 x 3 x 3" system: plant three species that bloom in spring, summer, and fall. This ensures a continuous food source for pollinators throughout the growing season [Wild Pollinator Partners](#)