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Your Garden - A Valuable Wildlife Corridor
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It's no surprise that human development disrupts wildlife and the ecosystem, pushing plants and animals out of their natural habitat into ever-smaller, more isolated habitat islands. Natural disasters such as wildfires and floods also play a detrimental role. Today, wildlife habitat islands are becoming more fragmented and disconnected, decreasing biodiversity and threatening species survival. Birds are just one example: there are 50 percent fewer birds today than 40 years ago, and over 230 species of North American birds are threatened with extinction.

The good news: your yard can help restore our local ecosystem to a healthier balance. How? By designing and maintaining landscape that attracts local wildlife. Neighborhood gardens and yards are increasingly important wildlife corridors, or bridges that help wildlife pass to and between their surrounding natural environments and habitat islands. Landscape plants offer more than aesthetic value; they can serve as part of a support network for migrating animals and insects that need water, cover areas, nectar and native vegetation.

Choosing native plants will attract pollinator insects and local wildlife. Natives also increase your chances to have successful plants, because they need less water and maintenance once they are established. Check out the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society; their website eldoradocnps.org has helpful information, such as the "Top Ten List" of deer and drought tolerant native plants for our county.

Many beautiful, non-native plants also provide valuable nectar for birds, bees and butterflies. Perennials Butterfly bush (*Buddleia*) and Pincushion Flower (*Scabiosa*), or seasonal annuals such as Marigolds and Zinnias, are just a few choices. Even weeds, such as nettles and thistles, offer butterfly and bird food.

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Consider a balanced landscape plan that works for you and for wildlife. Sturdy fencing around sunny areas of your property will protect valuable plants or trees, roses, vegetable gardens and edible crops. Leave other parts of the yard as open space, and invite wildlife passage with bird feeders, water sources, natural cover, and a mix of native and non-native plants.

Last: be willing to accept *some* damage to your plants. Inevitably, a wildlife “thief” will steal a prized flower or munch on leaves and branches. When your plants suffer wildlife damage – just take a deep breath, sit back and congratulate yourself on your garden wildlife corridor. You’ve just made a personal contribution to protecting the environment and restoring our local ecosystem!

There is no Master Gardener public education class this Saturday.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.