Welcome to the Gosling Wildlife Gardens, an Arboretum plant collection that:
- motivates visitors to do similar plantings in their own backyards,
- displays woody plants and perennials that are attractive to wildlife,
- promotes positive people-wildlife interactions,
- gives examples of how to increase the diversity of habitats and wildlife species in backyards,
- compliments Arboretum interpretive programs.

The name of the collection recognizes the significant founding donation and on-going support this project has received from Philip and Jean Gosling.

The collection is a neighbourhood of five gardens on the scale of urban and suburban backyards. Each one is planted with trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants that provide food, cover and nesting sites for wildlife. The plants selected for the gardens are available from nurseries.

After entering each garden, look for the house. These represent the location of the house for each backyard. Also note that the plantings have been arranged in relation to the backyard gardens, not the path. The path is purely to assist you in exploring each garden.

GARDEN # 1

**Butterfly, Moth and Hummingbird Garden**

The house in this garden is at the north end, attached to the deck.

A garden for butterflies is a garden of colour, nectar, shade, light, water and protection from wind. The beds on either side of the path contain flowers rich in colour and nectar. Identification beds can be found on your right.

On your left, you will see the pond. Around the pond, nectar producers such as Joe-Pye-Weed, hostas and Solomon’s Seal have been planted; these are excellent hummingbird-attracting plants. Water sources, like this pond, are important for butterflies. In addition, this pond is visited by song sparrows, robins, goldfinches and other birds and is the home of goldfish, dragonflies, green frogs, diving beetles and many other aquatic organisms.

Go a short way along the path and you will see a path and a trellis to your right. This leads to a pear tree and a carpet of white clover. Since butterfly-attracting plants are great nectar producers, honey bees and bumble bees also benefit from their presence in the garden. Pear trees flower in the spring and provide an important early nectar source for bees. The stonecrop and beebalm attract bees, butterflies, hummingbird moths and hummingbirds in late July and early August. Shrubs such as viburnum and elderberry growing at the edge of the clover, give off their sweet fragrance at night and are visited by moths.

To the left of the path, near the deck, is a raised bed planted with herbaceous species which are food for the larva of butterflies and moths. While we may enjoy butterflies it is easy to forget that each one was once a caterpillar; and these caterpillars have very specific food needs.

GARDEN # 2

**The Lawn**

You enter this garden by passing through a shrub border. This garden is the typical landscape of most backyards and it shows a distinct contrast to the other four gardens. Our maintenance here is weekly cutting using no fertilizer or pesticides. Lawn sprays kill all plants that are not grass, depleting the diversity of an already degraded habitat.

The house is located on the north or left side of the path. The wall of conifers and shrubs behind this house offers a good source of berries and cover for many birds and small mammals.

Lawns are a part of all five of our gardens and are very important for family recreational activities. The large white pine offers shade and the needle carpet below provides some visual change from the lawn.

Some wildlife species have adapted to this new habitat. Robins, starlings and chipping sparrows hunt for insects and earthworms here. Skunks dig up and eat June beetle larva which feed on the grass roots.

GARDEN # 3

**Prairie Garden**

The house in this garden is to the north, on your left as you enter. The path divides the lawn and two distinct forms of prairie habitats. Some wildlife species have adapted to this new habitat. Robins, starlings and chipping sparrows hunt for insects and earthworms here. Skunks dig up and eat June beetle larva which feed on the grass roots.

Identification beds are located immediately adjacent to the fence as you enter; short grass prairie on are your left and tall grass prairie species to your right. While we may not think of southern Ontario as a place for prairie, we are actually in its northeastern-most limit.

Our garden demonstrates the feasibility of establishing prairie habitats as a landscape feature. From a wildlife standpoint, this diversity of plants greatly increases the availability of wildlife cover and food. The tall grass prairie plants such as cup plant, prairie dock and big bluestem provide food for fall migrants and overwintering birds. In the short grass prairie, prairie smoke provides early season seed source for birds. Blazing star supplies both nectar and seed for later season birds and butterflies.

GARDEN # 4

**Suburban Garden**

Dividing the suburban garden from the prairie garden is a corridor of hawthorn which is...
representative of an old farm fence row. These trees supply nectar and pollen for insects and fruit and nest sites for many birds. The house is at the south end of this garden, to your right.

The suburban garden represents the wildlife landscaping that can be carried out in a large area that was once a field and is still bordered by an agricultural area. This garden contains a woodland restoration area (on your left as you enter) to reintroduce trees and woodland wildflowers. A stone fence creates habitat for garter snakes, spiders, and many insects. Vines growing on the wire fence behind the bench include bittersweet, Virginia creeper, wild grape, and wild cucumber. These vines will give cover for nesting brown thrashers, catbirds, and cardinals and food for other songbirds and small mammals.

A quaint vegetable garden bordered with willow-weaving and apple trees near the hawthorns, show that food for humans can be grown in a wildlife garden. By providing other plants for food sources and some creative fencings, rabbits and groundhogs can still visit the gardens and not eat one’s vegetables.

Black Swallowtail Larva on Dill

GARDEN # 5
SMALL CITY GARDEN

As you walked through the large gardens, you may have been wondering how one might apply the various wildlife gardening ideas to a smaller lot. This garden is a small-scale synthesis of the themes demonstrated throughout the Gosling Wildlife Gardens collection. Enter the garden by passing through the fence from the garden shed (the location of the house) and its adjacent patio you can see the shrub border to your right. Borders similar to this separate the Prairie Garden from the Suburban Garden and also the Butterfly Garden from The Lawn. The flagstone path leads you through a garden incorporating many plants used in previous gardens in design combinations appropriate for small urban properties. Look for the prickly pear cactus in front of the large boulder. The raised bed and the pond may remind you of Garden #1. The woodland garden incorporates native woodland species and common garden plants for shade. Fruit trees and shrubs are included as edge plantings.

Return to the shed and sit on the bench for awhile and experience the relationships which exist between plants and wildlife. Also, think about this collection not from the standpoint of individual gardens but rather the sense of community that the five gardens demonstrate: a synergy of effort that if replicated by gardeners, neighbours or whole neighbourhoods could truly produce a net gain of wildlife habitat in our urban areas. What a thought... that after so many years of habitat destruction we can give something back.

Exit the gardens through the cedar hedge. Return to the garden entrance and the Ivey Trail to your right or follow the McCrae Trail to your left.

For more information about the Gosling Wildlife Gardens or to make a donation, please contact Prof. Alan Watson, Arboretum Director.


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