

Put Yourself on the Map

You're the local expert for YardMap, our new citizen-science project

Bird watching and backyards have always gone together—many of the questions we answer each day at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology concern how people can best attract birds to their yards. Now, a new citizen-science project called YardMap helps you get the most from your yard, all while helping scientists collect data about how gardening practices affect birds.

YardMap works by giving participants tools to plan their yards, and by creating a community of gardeners with whom you can share ideas and advice. It's easy to use—if you've ever used Google to look at a satellite image of your house, you're well on your way to mapping your yard.

You start with a birds-eye view of your house and use our simple, point-and-click mapping tools to draw in ecological details. Your site

is automatically linked to our eBird project so that you can enter your bird sightings at will—create a yard list, keep track of spring arrivals and fall departures, or any other memorable visits by birds.

YardMap helps us learn about how Americans manage one of the most familiar and most extensive habitats on the continent. The average yard consists of lawn, hedge, flowerbeds, and driveways (see sidebar on right)—but we need to know about yards in a lot more detail than that. And by pairing habitat information with bird sightings, we can learn about the effects of different gardening practices at a much larger scale. But first we need help from the experts—you.

From the very smallest inhabitants to the grandest of trees, your yard has a role to play in helping to establish safe bird habitat.

We hope you'll join us at www.yardmap.org.

The Average American Yard

The average yard in North America is not huge—about a third of an acre. But those little patches of home contribute to about 160 million acres in total residential land area. It would take one person 4,110 years to mow all the lawn in the United States. What we each do to maintain our land can make a real ecological difference. So we crunched the numbers (from 21 scientific studies and government reports) to develop this aggregate picture of an American yard: It turns out most of us have homes that are about 60 percent lawn and 20 percent house and driveway, with just 20 percent left over for bird habitat. We water our lawns with about 60 gallons of water a day. About one-eighth of all material that goes into our landfills is yard waste that could be composted or otherwise used at home.

We created YardMap to develop better ways for people to see and understand these big patterns—and to create a community of gardeners and bird watchers.



Yards of All Colors

Although this illustration shows a typical backyard from the eastern United States, YardMap can work for anyone in North America. If you look outside the window and see more brown than green, maybe "xeriscaping"—gardening with drought-adapted plants—is the right look for your yard.

As many gardeners already know, planting native species can help your yard thrive, offers more to your local wildlife, and can save you money and save your community's resources. YardMap can connect you with tips and guidelines written specifically for your part of the continent—just enter your zip code to find them.



Point, Click, and Grow

Simple mapping tools let you outline the parts of your yard, then add details such as vegetation types, feeder locations, and more.

The items you add connect to specific resources and gardening ideas. And a social community is built right in. Research on your own, or connect with others to compare yards and trade notes.

Some common features many YardMap members have included:



1 LAWN

A patch of lawn provides a place to sit in the sun and play lawn games—or watch mockingbirds play them. Big lawns can have big impacts, though. An hour of lawn mowing generates emissions similar to driving 100 miles. About 60 percent of an average yard is lawn—but we can offer plenty of ideas about how to mix it up a bit.



2 HUMMINGBIRD GARDEN

Welcome hummingbirds to your yard with native hummingbird flowers such as cardinal flower, bee-balm, jewelweed, and trumpet creeper. Even if you're city-bound without much yard, you can attract hummingbirds by planting flowers in containers. Visit YardMap for many more ideas on using native flowers.



3 NEST BOX

Host a family in your yard! Nest boxes attract bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Wood Ducks, owls, wrens, chickadees, Great Crested Flycatchers, and other species. YardMap can connect you with our Nest-Watch project and give you ideas about the best ways to attract the specific birds you're looking for.



4 FEEDER

Sunflower tubes, nyjer-seed socks, or seed hoppers are among the first additions anyone makes to their yards. Feeders provide enjoyment for us and supplemental food for birds. YardMap can help you track what birds you see, plan what foods to offer, and decide where to place your feeders for best results and safety.



5 BRUSH PILE

An easy way to create bird habitat is to pile tree trimmings and fallen branches into a brush pile—a place for wrens to live and a refuge for wintering sparrows. YardMap offers ideas such as how a Christmas tree can start a new career as a brush pile, and how brush can even protect growing trees from browsing deer.



6 SNAG

The ultimate combination nest box and bird feeder is a standing dead tree—a place for woodpeckers to drum, nuthatches to hatch, and many other species to forage, roost, and nest. Snags can be a hazard if they're close to your house, but we've got suggestions on possible ways to safely include them in your backyard habitat.