



Backyard Habitat Best Practices

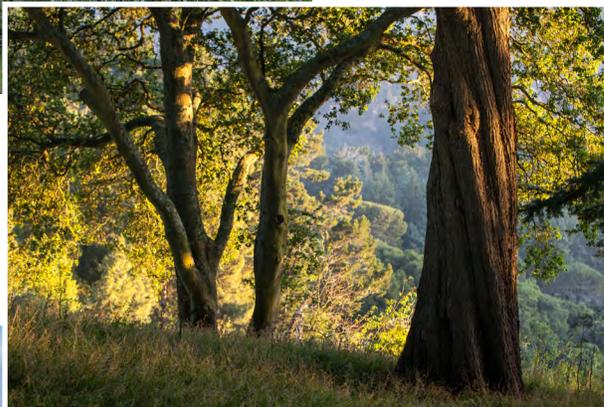
Preserving and Recreating Habitat

The most effective method of preserving or restoring wildlife habitat on a property is to allow part of the property to remain in relatively undisturbed natural state and to encourage the propagation of native vegetation in that area. This habitat might be designed to attract insects including pollinators such as honey bees, butterflies, or moths; it might be designed to attract birds including ground dwelling birds such as quail; an area in the farthest reaches of a property might allow for burrowing animals such as gophers, rodents, and snakes.





Riparian Areas Preserving riparian habitat on creekside properties, or properties containing ponds and wetlands, is of utmost importance as all wildlife needs water and uses riparian corridors for migration. The Town of Woodside and other regulatory bodies govern much of what can be done in riparian areas. In general, the Woodside municipal code considers a riparian area to be 25ft from the top of the bank or 50ft from the center of the stream whichever is greater. Development in these areas is severely restricted and removal and planting of vegetation is regulated and requires permits. In all cases it is important to encourage native vegetation such as bay trees, willows and oaks and to eliminate invasive species such as Acacia, Pampas Grass, and French Broom. Additionally, it is important to preserve the natural characteristics of the stream itself wherever possible, including riffles, pools, gravel beds, stable undercut banks, overhanging vegetation, and in-stream woody debris, in order to promote fish and amphibian habitat. A healthy and undisturbed riparian area is important not just for the benefits it provides to wildlife but also for the role it plays in preventing stream pollution including siltation.

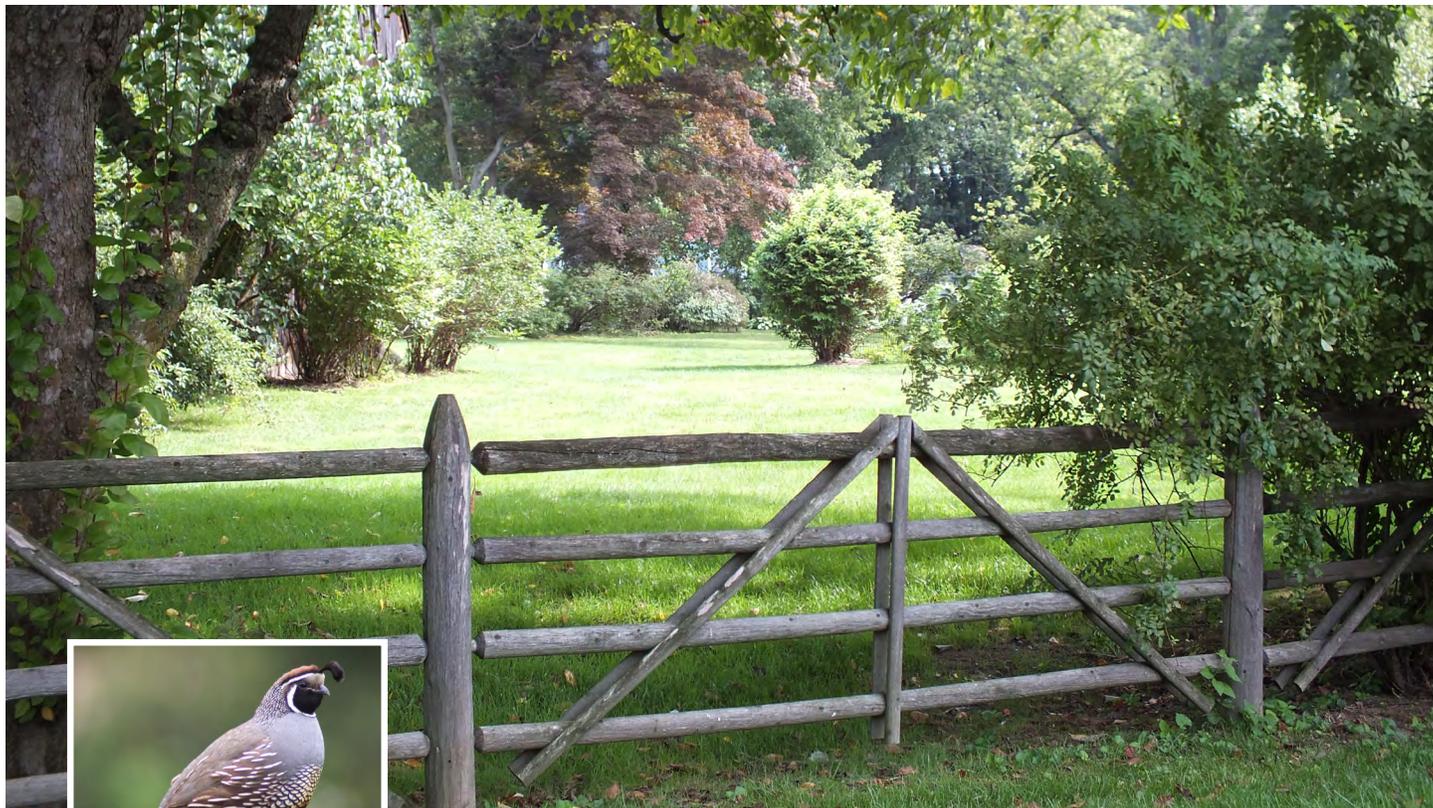


Hillside Areas Preserving undisturbed natural habitat in hillside areas is encouraged by the Town of Woodside through both Zoning and Site Development ordinances in order to prevent slope destabilization. Properties with slopes in excess of 12.5% must leave a certain percentage as open space. Much of the hillside areas consist of Redwood and mixed evergreen forests including Douglas-fir, California Bay Laurel, Buckeye and Madrone. Appropriate understory plants in this habitat would include Huckleberry, Hazelnut, Creeping

Snowberry, Wax Myrtle and herbaceous plants such as Redwood Sorrel, Fat Salomon's Seal, Sword Fern, Wood Rose, Woodland Strawberry and Evergreen Violet.



The Valley Floor Properties on the valley floor are mostly made up of oak woodlands and perennial grasslands. Appropriate understory plants for oaks would include Manzanitas, Toyon, Coffeeberry, Poison Oak, Monkeyflower and Ceanothus. Grassland areas would include native Needlegrasses, Bromes, Blue-eyed Grass, California Buttercups and Blue Wild Rye.



Wildlife Access to Habitat

Fencing The purpose of saving or restoring habitat is for wildlife to be able to access it. This may involve making modifications to perimeter fencing or sections of it so that it is more wildlife friendly. The current Town fencing ordinance encourages open fencing. Historically this has been interpreted as open-looking fencing, as opposed to fencing that is open to allow for the passage of wildlife. Consequently, many properties have become wildlife-free zones. Property owners interested in enhancing habitat values on their land are encouraged to use open post and rail fencing which complements the Town of Woodside's rural atmosphere and provides for the unhindered and safe movement of wildlife. If the fence contains wire mesh, then space can be left under the bottom of the wire for wildlife to pass through or gaps left in the fence itself.



Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Connectivity Additionally, where possible, this program is intended to encourage property owners to think about preserving and restoring habitat in such a way that it sustains a network of habitat including wildlife corridors so that wildlife may move around Town without using the road system as migratory corridors.

One of the greatest dangers many animal species face today is the fragmentation of their habitat due to human activities and development. An animal population that is isolated in a small area declines due to inability to find suitable mates, and because its food sources can be negatively affected by the proximity of humans. Wildlife corridors are being established on a large scale in and between our National Parks in an effort to allow animal populations to travel between large areas of protected habitat. This improves the diversity and hence the resiliency of the species. Woodside

is in the unique position of being able to follow this model on a smaller scale. The town's many open space and natural areas support a remarkable array of wild creatures, whose populations may stay wild if they are given the opportunity to migrate through areas resembling their natural habitat. Streams, even ephemeral ones, are the most important elements of this network, as they are the key to connecting the various habitat areas. They provide excellent cover in addition to natural pathways for animals to follow.

If all the properties along a given stream are kept in a natural undeveloped and unfenced state, the result will be a wildlife corridor, which allows free migration and keeps animals out of roadways. Key to our effort is the issue of connectivity: If neighboring properties work together to align their natural spaces, particularly if one of the properties abuts a preserve or other designated open space area, our local wildlife face a far smaller risk of isolation and extinction.



Habitat Preservation and Fire Safety

The Town of Woodside and the Woodside Fire Protection District have adopted wildfire prevention guidelines based on changes in state law. The primary goal is to reduce local fuel load, especially invasive exotic species, through brush removal and thinning. However, adhering to certain landscape design principles can allow for the existence of habitat without compromising safety: the fuel load should be minimized within 30 – 100 ft of structures and habitat areas should be located as far from the primary residence as possible to provide the least disturbance to wildlife. Preventing fire from spreading by interrupting its horizontal and vertical path is also extremely important so islands of habitat consisting of low clumps of native shrubbery or brush piles are permissible.



New Ways of Thinking About Landscaping

Woodside's forests contain a stunning array of flora, and these plants are designed by nature to thrive in our particular climate. In terms of landscape design, we encourage residents to take cues from the undeveloped land around them, creating a comfortable progression from formal landscaping around the house to natural woodlands in the further reaches of the property. Gardeners might change their focus from installing a landscape to husbanding what would naturally occur. Plantings near one's house might be well-ordered flowerbeds and manicured shrubs, but we can allow nature to take over as we move away from the heavily trafficked areas. The transition can be accomplished by incorporating native plants into the landscape design, placing them where they should naturally occur, and utilizing the existing features of the property. Working outward from the house, lawns can give way to meadows, terraces to rock gardens, and wooded areas provide shade for the native understory plants which will germinate on their own.

As the wildland interface is reached, take care to not disturb the sensitive understory as little as possible. Excessive dead material which could present a fire danger should be cut but dropped and left in place. Gardening efforts should be limited to removal of non-native invasive plants. For more information on invasive plants please see the resources guide.

Other Important Things to Know

Don't feed the animals The aim of this program is to encourage wildlife to exist as it would with minimal interference from humans, so homeowners should not provide any artificial forms of food or shelter. Garbage and pet food should be stored inaccessibly, and no additional food should be placed outside for wildlife to consume. Rather, they should be able to seek the sustenance and shelter provided by native vegetation and natural features of the land. Steps should be taken to prevent wild creatures from nesting in and under houses. Many creatures make use of snags (dead trees left standing) for shelter and food storage. These should be left in place wherever it is reasonable to do so.

Lighting Woodside's lighting regulations are intended to comply with the Dark Sky Initiative and since wildlife foraging does not take place where there is night lighting, outdoor lighting close to habitat areas should be minimal, face downward and toward the house.

Domestic Animals Domestic pets, particularly cats, are at risk of predation and in turn are the largest cause of mortality for small wildlife. We encourage keeping cats indoors.

Organic Gardening Organic gardening practices will help maintain a healthy ecosystem — Use of pesticides and herbicides should be curtailed, especially next to water sources and pollinator habitat. For those with septic systems, the use of household cleaning chemicals such as bleach and antibacterial soaps can poison the soil. These products should be used sparingly.

We encourage keeping all organic waste on site. Composting keeps excess carbon dioxide and sheer mass out of the landfill and improves soil microbiology. Take advantage of Woodside's chipper program and use all cuttings and chips to form brush piles and to mulch your landscaping. This, combined with use of drought-tolerant native plants, will reduce your water consumption, keep invasive weeds at bay and help reduce our carbon footprint!

Easy Steps Toward Creating a Backyard Habitat

- Landscape with Bay Area native plants.
- Allow little-used areas of the property to revert to a wild state. Keep activity closer to the house and concentrate gardening activities there.
- Reassess perimeter fencing needs – if fencing is for safety then consider leaving some part of the property away from the residence unfenced; if fencing is for privacy then create gaps for wildlife to pass through or under; if fencing is to keep a dog in check, consider leaving a front or back portion of the property unfenced; if it is to protect plantings then place the fence only around a small area of edible plants, and landscape the rest of the property with deer-resistant foliage.
- Make sure streambeds are unobstructed and left with its natural riparian vegetation intact, for at least 50 feet from its center or 25ft from the top of the bank.
- Leave low-growing native shrubbery and brush piles at some distance from the house to provide cover for small creatures.
- Work with your neighbors to create adjoining bands of open space, fostering ease of wildlife travel from one property to the next.
- Try to eradicate invasive nonnative vegetation including but not limited to Scotch or French Broom, Pampas Grass, Vinca, Ivy, Slender False Brome, Burr Clover, Star Thistle and other thistles, and Bermuda Grass.
- Follow the lead of Woodsiders who have planted native meadows or drought-tolerant ground cover in place of lawns
- Reduce dependence on chemical fertilizers and cleaning products.



The Backyard Habitat program acknowledges honorees with a gift of a three-foot tall forged metal sign to be displayed near the entrance to their property.