

# Habitat Network: From the Actions of You and Your Neighbors, Habitat Can Emerge!

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When you think of the typical American yard, you might picture a home or apartment with a few ornamental plants and lots of lawn. Having a lawn is fine, but why do we need so much of it? Did you know the United States has more than 40 million acres of lawn, in which approximately 30 billion dollars, 7 billion gallons of water, and 3 million tons of pesticides are invested annually to care for and maintain spaces that provide minimal ecological benefit to wildlife or people?

If we convert just a part of all this uniform looking, inefficient lawn and make small changes in how these landscapes are designed and managed, we can add wildlife habitat, reduce strain on streams and rivers, support migratory species, and turn barriers into bridges for wildlife. These enhancements to diversify yards and public spaces add beauty and value to homes and neighborhoods and provide opportunities to spend more time enjoying nature closer to home.

Habitat Network ([www.habitat.network](http://www.habitat.network)) is a citizen science program that serves a variety of purposes, which resonate with users in different ways. Whether it's a desire to provide habitat to support nature and conservation close to home or to improve the aesthetics and functionality of an outdoor space (i.e. yard, school yard, patio, office building, or park), Habitat Network strives to inform, inspire, and transform residential landscapes into

more diverse habitats that can support wildlife and connect people to nature in communities around the world.

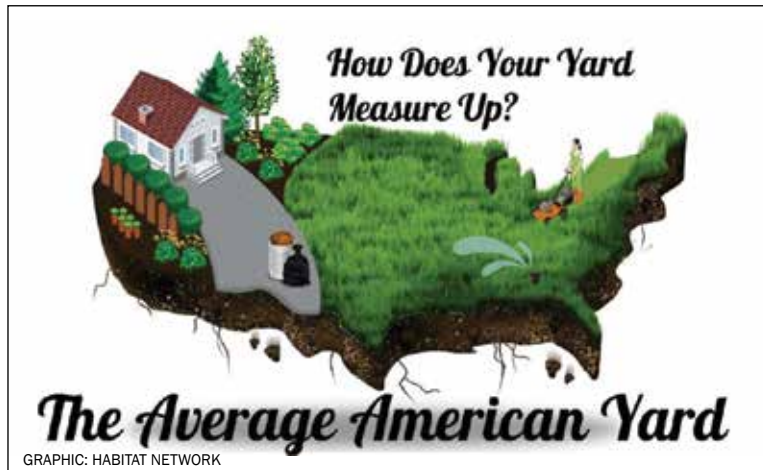
The network consists of scientists, garden enthusiasts, birders, educators, students, wildlife enthusiasts, landscape designers, and organizations that collectively and consciously take action to improve outdoor spaces for the benefit of wildlife and people. No matter the size or location of your property, Habitat Network can help you learn about practices that can support a diversity of plants and animals, build resilience into residential landscapes, and benefit people.

## What is Habitat Network?

One of the key activities to engage with on the site is the Map feature. The Tool Shed allows you to map the various layers of your yard or project area, from the basics of the property outline to naming habitats and placing objects such as specific features like trees, shrubs, planters, and flower beds. Once you have these details filled in, the tool will ask you for more important information,

such as how often you water, whether you use synthetic herbicides or fertilizers, and what are your mowing and yard maintenance practices.

Once you have finished your map, you might be thinking, "Now where do I begin?" Not to worry, our Explore and



*The average American yard consists of 59.5% manicured Lawn, 19.3% building/hard surfaces, 3.7% veggie Gardens, and 17.8% other. This image depicts the average American yard in relation to the Continental United States © Habitat Network*



*An example of a small action that reduces our lawns, provides resources and habitat, all while adding beauty to our properties © Megan Whatton*

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*A habitat map created by a Habitat Network user demonstrates the mapping process, details of data collection, and beauty in participating in our network © Habitat Network*

Learn tools help answer some of those hard questions like “What plants are native to my region?” or “What habitat features are best,” and “Where should they go in my yard?” These topics, and many others (over 160) on how and why to make decisions and take action to achieve specific outcomes, can be found on Habitat Network.

Outcomes from using techniques learned on Habitat Network can include more bird sightings, more efficient use of energy and water, and more pollinators, such as bees and butterflies (which can yield better garden bounties). Also, being part of the network provides inspiration and motivation from seeing what others are doing and setting specific actionable goals.

The Planning tool available on the Habitat Network allows you to analyze your mapped property and to see where you are meeting certain goals such as managing water, conserving resources, or supporting wildlife and how and where you can take specific actions to improve. The Planning tool allows you to opt in to actions you’d like to do or opt out of suggestions you cannot implement. The actions and goals update as individual property maps are

updated, allowing you to track and stay motivated along your path.

In addition to learning, the Habitat Network is an online conservation community, focused on sharing strategies, maps, and successes to build more wildlife habitat. This social networking tool intends to build a community of like-minded people, who can share their knowledge and experience with friends and neighbors to inspire more diverse yards and outdoor spaces. The Forum posts facilitate chatting with other users and sharing what you’re doing. The Groups feature lets you find and join a group or create your own. Groups have been created around shared interests, such as removing invasive species or to map and enhance a shared space or neighborhood.

### **How can you become part of the movement?**

**You can join the network** by visiting [www.habitat.network](http://www.habitat.network) and signing up to join the movement to contribute to conservation science and to create more habitat to support wildlife and people.

Once you have joined and begun the mapping process, join our Boston Habitat Network Group to help us track our efforts in the Boston Metro Area and to connect to those around you. As of this writing, Conservator board members Pete Gilmore, Ken Mallory, and Beth Wilkinson, have started to create maps of their property that you can access by going to <http://app.yardmap.org/map#!/groups> go to “find group” search with the word “newton,” click on “Habitat Newton,” and click on the icon MAPS just below the map and it will lead you to properties in our group. One other suggestion: if you create your own map, go first to <https://youtu.be/EP0N07o9ApY> and it will help you understand the mapping process.

### **We hope to see you on the map! ■**



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

*Cygnets*



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

*Trillium at Cold Spring Park*