



How to Help Wildlife Overwinter *By Isabell Wu, Spring 2020 Class*

As winter arrives and temperatures drop significantly, the Habitat (Demo) Garden at Seabourne Prairie is leaving the stems, leaves, and seeds of plants in order to give insects and other wildlife a place to shelter during the colder months. Here's how you can help wildlife survive through the winter.

Birds in particular require water and food sources all winter. Help out our feathery friends by providing them with high-fat sunflower seeds, peanuts, niger seeds, and grated suet. Fruit is a favorite of robins, blackbirds, and thrushes. Providing fresh water in birdbaths will help birds keep their feathers clean, and therefore be more waterproof and warmer.

Aquatic creatures will appreciate you keeping the surface of your pond from freezing over by placing a floating ball in to create ripples or melting a hole through the ice using boiling water. Stacking logs and clay tiles near the edge of your pond will help frogs and toads overwinter.

Many insects in Texas are freeze avoidant, meaning they cannot survive their internal bodily fluids being frozen. Be cautious when cultivating plants or mulching as queen bees, butterflies and moths may be hibernating beneath the surface of the ground and at the base of food plants and grasses. Hollow stems are another place insects love to overwinter in, so hold off on cutting herbaceous perennials until springtime. Leave leaf litter and debris to serve as a great habitat for insects and nutrients for the soil once it breaks down.

Building a bug hotel may ensure a high level of pollination in the spring and fall seasons. You can easily build one using hollow bamboo, sticks, pinecones, straw, wood drilled with holes and hollow bricks. Place these materials in a wooden frame and cover with a metal mesh. The best place for an insect hotel is in a protected area shaded from the sun. If you need inspiration for what to put in your hotel, check out the Demo Garden at Seabourne Creek Nature Park. An alternative to building your own is buying one online. A bug hotel shouldn't cost much, and you can buy one for less than \$20.*

Finally, we are asking YOU to document plants and insects using a journal or iNaturalist in the Demo Garden for Seabourne Park. This counts for VSP hours. So, look in the bug hotel and check the remaining plant vegetation and see what you can discover!

Sources

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/oct/28/how-to-help-garden-wildlife-survive-winter>

<https://owlcation.com/stem/how-do-insects-survive-winter>

<https://xerces.org/blog/put-down-those-pruners-pollinators-need-your-garden-garbage>

**Make sure the bee house you buy is 6" deep for the proper size.*



Photos by Lynn Trenta