

Make Your Backyard Wildlife Friendly

Winter Green Night at Library on March 14

Spring is coming and homeowners are starting to think about getting out in the yard again and making it an enjoyable place. But, how about also making that space friendly to your wildlife friends?

On Thursday, March 14, Wildlife Biologist Sheldon Owen will help you think through some first steps.

Geared to adults and children alike, the workshop will cover how to give native wild plants and animals what they need to thrive, while avoiding damage some of them can cause. The session takes place 6:00–7:30pm at the downtown public library (373 Spruce Street).

Owen is the Wildlife Extension Specialist for the West Virginia University Extension Service. He has worked extensively on various wildlife issues over his career and now promotes general wildlife ecology and wildlife habitat management in the Morgantown area and throughout West Virginia.

That doesn't just mean in fields and forests. Owen often talks to community groups about how everyone can share their backyards with native species of plants and animals in ways that are safe and healthy for both critters and people.

"In this age of development and urbanization, we all need to work together to maintain enough habitat for our native wildlife species," Owen said.

That can include in our towns and suburbs, he noted. "In fact, neighborhoods can form a patchwork of trees, bushes, and plants capable of supporting birds, butterflies, bees, and small amphibians, reptiles, and mammals—with planning and effort."

"Food, shelter, and water are the three components that all animals need to survive. At the Extension Service, we encourage landowners to enhance property in order to provide these requirements. My talk will be a primer to get landowners thinking about which of these elements their property already has and how they can enhance them to make attractive wildlife habitat."

Anyone can bring a little nature home, no matter where they live. It can be as simple as a window box, bird bath, or bird feeder for apartment or townhouse dwellers, or a complete backyard plan with trees, bushes, and plants that provide berries, nuts, nectar, as well as shelter for animals. "We can all do something, however small, to provide wildlife habitat in our yards," Owen said.

With a PhD in forest resource science, Owen knows all about the pros and cons of wildlife close to home. His graduate research addressed the ecology of forest-dwelling bats and raccoons, both species often found in residential areas. He later served as a wildlife disease specialist for the U.S. Department of

Agriculture (USDA) and a supervisory wildlife biologist for the USDA in South Carolina, before coming to Morgantown and the WVU Extension Service.

He will be sure to talk about how homeowners can prevent, manage, or reduce damage when humans and wildlife “come into conflict,” for example, deer and raccoons.

But it goes both ways. “Cats—both feral and pet—are a hot topic. I will discuss the need to keep cats indoors and reduce the number of cats roaming free.”

Targeting the average citizen, Green Nights at the Library is a series of presentations, workshops, and resource events on green topics that will continue monthly at the downtown public library or other locations through Spring 2013.

Sponsored by the Morgantown Municipal Green Team, Green Nights at the Library continues in the Spring with a resource fair in April on “Green Gardening.” Attendees can ask resource people about starting an organic garden, creating a compost pile, installing a rain barrel, and a host of other easy ideas for homeowners. The location and date of that event are not yet set.

Residents of all ages in the Morgantown area are welcome to attend the workshop, which will take place in on the first floor of the Morgantown Public Library. Parking is available across the street and a nearby parking structure.

For more information, please contact Pamela Cubberly, Morgantown Green Team (Pamela@Cubberly.net).

The Morgantown Municipal Green Team is a group of citizens that advises the City of Morgantown on matters relating to sustainability in public policy, planning, education, departmental management, development, and evaluation of environmental and energy-related issues. For more information, please visit www.morgantowngreenteam.org.