ABQ Backyard Refuge Program

Habitat Elements

Certification Workbook

ABQ Backyard Refuge Program

Every bit of habitat counts!

Certify your space as a backyard refuge!

You can certify your yard, patio, or balcony as an official ABQ Backyard Refuge and highlight the important changes you are making in your personal space to support wildlife. The ABQ Backyard Refuge certification process is for anyone who has an outdoor space where they can have plants—from a large yard to a patio or balcony.

When you build a backyard refuge by adding native habitat and caring for your space in wildlife-friendly ways, you are contributing to a large-scale community conservation effort. One element of certification can be your engagement with habitat conservation and restoration projects throughout the greater Albuquerque area. Spreading the word about sharing space with wildlife and participating in conservation projects can make a huge difference for our community of wildlife and people.

Certification is donation-based and can be free. We provide participants with a certified ABQ Backyard Refuge sign for your space and a sticker indicating the year you certify your space. We encourage you to re-certify your habitat each year with a report about your refuge and your efforts to support our wildlife neighbors. Each year that you recertify you'll receive a new commemorative sticker for you to collect and add to your sign!

Visit ABQbackyardrefuge.org for more helpful resources!

Valle de Oro Urban National Wildlife Refuge

FRIENDS OF VALLE DE ORO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

CIUDAD SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

URBANWATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

BERN CO Bernalillo County

SOUTHERN SANDOVAL COUNTY ARROYO FLOOD CONTROL AUTHORITY

Certification Application

The ABQ Backyard Refuge Certification application can be accessed through the program's website, **abqBackyardRefuge.org.**
The application is digital. The first step is a registration form and the confirmation will include a link to a Google form for telling us about your habitat. Then, just send photos of your refuge show off your habitat, including an overview of the space and key habitat features. Keep taking photos throughout the year for your recertification "reports" in the future! If you'd like for us to share the photos publicly, they can show others examples of creating a refuge for wildlife and people!

Certification Workbook

This workbook is designed to help you discover what habitat you may already have in your yard and find new ways to provide for our wild neighbors. The sections align with the different components of habitat. Use these pages to track and keep notes about your current practices, or plans to achieve each required component of certification—food, water, shelter and space. You can also document your engagement in large-scale initiatives and use of sustainable practices. You can track which level of certification you are currently achieving for each section or component of certification.

Take notes on habitat elements you would like to add to your space, or activities to engage in as you grow your habitat and participation in community conservation!

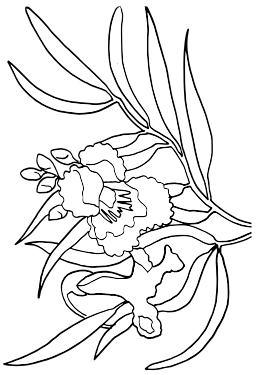
Three Levels of ABQ Backyard Refuge Certification

Contributing Habitat: Ideal for smaller spaces including small yards, patios, balconies and for larger spaces where you are just beginning to add habitat features.

Connector Habitat: Ideal for smaller yards that provide the basic elements of habitat including food, water, shelter and space for most of the year.

Core Habitat: Ideal for large yards and community spaces with mature habitat that provide a diversity of the key elements of habitat including food, water, shelter and space, to support wildlife during every season.

ABQ Backyard Refuge Design



If you want to add more habitat to your space, use these pages to make a map of your plan! By plotting out your space, you can more easily decide on elements to add based on size and the mature growth of the plant species.
You can use our plant list as the basis for your design. The list provides the habitat value for each plant in addition to sunlight and water requirements, mature size, etc.
Photos and geographic distribution of each plant can be found at our iNaturalist guide: https://www.inaturalist.org/guides/13425

By creating a comprehensive design, you can set goals for yourself and the garden you want to create including who (what kind of wildlife) you are trying to attract, when (time of year) that wildlife will be in our community and what part of their needs your space will meet. Then match your goals with your resources. Smaller spaces should be carefully planned. Container gardens in tight spaces can still provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife while allowing you to experiment without much investment. If you are converting a smaller space, be strategic and look at the gardens around you to see how you can tie your planting into the larger landscape of your neighborhood rather than trying to fit everything to support wildlife in a smaller space. This is a great opportunity to recruit your neighbors to create a diverse mosaic of wildlife habitat throughout your community, rather than just in your yard or space.

Another thing to consider is that existing plants in your yard may already be providing important habitat benefits. Before beginning to make substantial changes, watch and listen for activity in your yard. If you find wildlife using certain areas and plants, consider working to improve habitat around those areas. A dense non-native shrub or mature tree may be providing shelter and habitat benefits that a new plant could take years to replace. While you may need to remove an established non-native or water-intensive plant, consider waiting until your new plants are well established and able to provide that habitat benefit.

Plotting Your Space

Creating a scaled drawing of your space is helpful to visualize, plan and build your ABQ Backyard Refuge. Imagine this task as making a roadmap; just as a roadmap has an appropriate scale, choosing the best scale for your space is important for drawing in plants and other features at their mature sizes to avoid overplanting and overcrowding.

- To plot or create a drawing of the space you wish to convert to an ABQ Backyard Refuge, use the grid-lined sheet on the last page or own graph paper. In the sheet we provide, the major, darker gridlines are spaced 1" apart and divided with lighter lines to create 100 blocks per square inch.
- In order to determine an appropriate scale for your drawing, you will need to know the outside dimensions of the space you want to convert or modify. Be sure to use a measuring tool to get an accurate reading of your space rather than estimating the size.
- If your area measures 70 ft x 50 ft, or similar dimensions, use a scale of 1 inch equals 5 foot (so a single darker square on the gridded paper is 5 ft x 5 ft and a group of four darker squares on the grid equals 100 square feet).
- If your space is smaller, use a scale that maximizes the size of the drawing on the grid. You might use the scale of 1 inch equals 1 foot (so each darker square on the grid equals 10 square feet).
- If your area is fairly large, it can be difficult to label details legibly, therefore you may want to break your space into separate, more manageable areas and use multiple sheets of graph paper.

Now, plot your space using your chosen dimensions. Use a pencil so you can erase or make changes.

- Measure the positions…
- Measure the outer perimeter of the space you are designing and plot it on the gridded sheet. Be sure to use a measuring tool to get an accurate reading rather than estimating the size of your space.
- Measure the positions of any features that will be part of your backyard refuge and plot them on your base plan: existing trees and shrubs; the walls and windows and doors of the house that face the space; existing patios and walkways, etc.
- Make note of any features that may be removed to accommodate the new design.

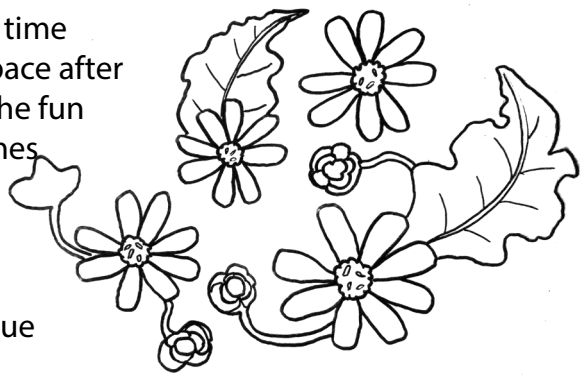
Although you may eventually want to turn your whole yard into habitat, feel free to only plot the space you will start converting, knowing you can plot out your space again in the future if you want to add to your habitat area. This allows you to start with a more manageable, strategic and meaningful space.

Take photos of the area from several angles (including the view from adjacent windows) to use as a reference. This helps put the space into context, remind you of existing features you need to work around, and document your starting point.

Creating Your Design

- Start with drainage and grading, identifying where water is available and how to move it to planted areas using water management or improved landscaping techniques.
- Organize space around rainwater harvesting opportunities to support existing large or water-intensive plants or space for a future tree or plant that will require extra water.
- Identify space for pathways that will divide larger spaces into smaller planting areas.
- Indicate any area available to layer stones against a wall to create more space for wildlife and a unique planting area. Desert plants will grow well in between rocks.
- Be sure to leave open space or bare ground for native bees or seating areas for wildlife viewing while in the landscape. If you are mulching an area, leave a mosaic of bare patches.
- Consider the location of windows to design areas for winter wildlife-viewing opportunities.
- Consider what you value in a yard or garden space and design for your values first, then take note of the habitat value. After all, you are designing a refuge for you and your family as well as wildlife. Be sure to leave space for play and engaging in your space.
- Place the largest plants and trees on the plan first, which will help determine light availability for adjacent plants and water shared between them.
- Think about building habitat from the ground-up and sky-down. The more layers you build the more diversity you create to support more wildlife through more seasons.
- Plan for seasonal abundance. Early spring-blooming plants can be paired with summer-to-fall-blooming plants. Add evergreen plants and native ornamental grasses for winter habitat and beauty!

- Clustering and massing plants in groups is especially effective for supporting pollinators. Aim for 5 to 7 clusters of wildflowers or grasses planted together, spaced far enough apart so each plant can grow well (see mature sizes noted in the plant list.)
- Take note of sun availability in your planting spaces during different seasons to help choose appropriate plants with different light requirements.
- Create separate zone areas in your design specifically for native plants, which require less water / intermittent deep watering, and non-native plants, which usually require more water more frequently. That way you can more effectively satisfy the water requirements for a zone rather than plant by plant.
- Remember, you will not get things 100% right the first time around, and you may need to redesign areas of your space after each season to work better for your goals, but part of the fun of developing habitat are the lessons learned. Sometimes things may not work as you planned, but the result may be just as successful at attracting wildlife, and interesting to look at as well.



- Flexibility is key knowing this is a space you will continue to work on and play in.
- You will better enjoy your space and the process of designing a refuge if you learn to become a partner with nature, rather than trying to control it.
- Some plants may not do well where you thought they would, so be flexible and learn from each season. Remember that well-adapted plants grow roots before they develop new top growth, so give plants time to establish themselves.
- At the beginning, experiment with a variety of plants and build on what flourishes in different planting areas.
- Spend time in your yard watching and listening for wildlife and look for ways you can support them while attracting more wild neighbors.
- Take notes of necessary changes for future years and refine your design each year.

"in reshaping our thinking about dandelions or other so-called weeds, we might reshape our entire relationship with the living world"

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Food for Wildlife

Contributing Habitat Requirement: Provide at least 2 sources of wildlife-appropriate food (or 1 plant as a food source and 1 water source).

Connector Habitat Requirement: Provide at least 4 sources of wildlife-appropriate food with at least 2 being native plants on the ABQ Backyard Refuge plant list.

Core Habitat Requirement: Provide at least 6 sources of mature wildlife-appropriate food from native plants during all 4 seasons

NOTE: List a different plant for each food source category below. A single plant might provide several different types of food. For example, a cherry tree provides both fruit and pollen; it could be listed either as a "plant that provides fruits, berries, or nuts", or as a "plant that provides pollen or nectar". Ideally you could mix and match the plants in your space to fill each category and provide the required number of food sources for the level of certification you hope to achieve. **Include plants from the ABQ Backyard Refuge Plant List and other drought-tolerant native species that provide pollen, nectar, seeds, fruits, nuts, etc. Our list contains a few hundred wildlife-friendly plants, but many other drought-tolerant native plants also provide excellent habitat.** The suitability of plants not on the list will be determined when your application is evaluated. Plants in the same genus as those on our plant list are usually a good bet. Email us at abqbackyardrefuge@friendsofvalledeoro.org if you have questions about suitable plant species. To learn more about each of the plants on ouur list and where they are found around this area, go to our iNaturalist guide: https://www.inaturalist.org/guides/13425

Leaves and twigs that provide food for wildlife

Plant Species and Description:

Seasonal Availability:

Plant(s) that provide pollen or nectar for wildlife

Plant Species and Description:

Seasonal Availability:

Plant(s) that provide seeds or pods for wildlife

Plant Species and Description:

Seasonal Availability:

Plant(s) that provide fruits, berries or nuts for wildlife

Plant Species and Description:

Seasonal Availability:

Supplemental feeders that provide seed, nectar, suet or nuts for wildlife

Feeder Types:

Seasonal Availability:

SEASONAL NOTES

List each food source you identified above in the applicable season it is available. Then check the box to indicate the seasons that you are providing food for wildlife:

- ☐ Spring:
- ☐ Summer:
- ☐ Fall:
- ☐ Winter:

DESIGN & CERTIFICATION NOTES

Level of certification currently met:

How and where might you add additional food sources to achieve a higher level of certification or diversify your habitat?

Water Source for Wildlife

Contributing Habitat Requirement: Not required *but can be a substitution of 1 water source for a supplemental food source.*

Connector Habitat Requirement: One source of water for wildlife available to support wildlife during at least three seasons.

Core Habitat Requirement: At least two sources of water with both readily available to support wildlife during all four seasons.

Water Source

☐ Birdbath

☐ Bowl of water

☐ Other (Describe):

☐ Drip water system for wildlife

☐ Puddling area for insects and small wildlife

Seasonal Availability:

SEASONAL NOTES

A plan for maintaining water sources to support wildlife during each season:

DESIGN & CERTIFICATION NOTES

Level of certification currently met:

How and where you could incorporate new water sources in your space to achieve a higher level of certification or diversify your habitat?

Shelter (cover for wildlife or places to raise young)

Contributing Habitat Requirement: Not required

Connector Habitat Requirement: At least 2 sources of shelter or places for roosting to support wildlife during all four seasons.

Core Habitat Requirement: At least 4 sources of shelter or places for roosting for supporting wildlife during all four seasons.

Shelter Areas

Describe the location of each shelter area in your space when you check each box.

- ☐ Trees:
- ☐ Dense shrub or plant area:
- ☐ Undisturbed native grass area:
- ☐ Ground cover:
- ☐ Rock pile or rock/adobe wall:
- ☐ Bird house, bat box, bee/insect cubby:
- ☐ Protected or built burrow:
- ☐ Host plants for insects:
- ☐ Small brush or log pile (a distance from structures due to wildfire risk):
- ☐ Snags (dead branches on trees):
- ☐ Other:

SEASONAL NOTES

A plan for how and when you will clean out wildlife boxes, provide different forms of shelter during different seasons, and trim trees and brush to avoid disturbing nesting or burrowing habitats of wildlife:

DESIGN & CERTIFICATION NOTES

Level of certification currently met:

How and where might you add additional sources of shelter or places for roosting to achieve a higher level of certification or diversify your habitat?