

Outline of Community Wildlife Sanctuary Certification Pilot Program

Phase 1 - Community Engagement

Approximate time frame: The first year

Communities completing Phase 1 are designated as 'Audubon-at-Home Habitat Friendly Communities.'

Track 1 - Community Association Agreement

1. An Audubon-at-Home Ambassador walks the area with you and gives recommendations.
2. Your community association agrees to these policies. (2.1-2.6 are required)
 - 2.1. Choose species native to our area for 90-100% of new plantings on community property, and never use invasive introduced plants.
 - 2.2. Put a multi-year plan in place to control and when possible eradicate existing invasive plants.
 - 2.3. Only use insecticides on community property if there is a hazard that needs to be addressed.
 - 2.4. Revise HOA rules for private properties to encourage the use of [natural landscaping](#).
 - 2.5. Reduce use of fertilizer, herbicides and other pesticides. *
 - 2.6. Reduce area covered by lawn grass.
 - 2.7. Maintain or create vegetated buffers along streams and lakes.
 - 2.8. Take steps to retain stormwater.
 - 2.9. Reduce hazards to wildlife
 - 2.9.1. Encourage residents to keep cats indoors.
 - 2.9.2. Encourage everyone to guard against human-made hazards like window collision, light and noise pollution, and pest bait.

*The term 'pesticide' includes insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides.

Track 2 - Grassroots organization

Community Stewards canvas their neighborhoods to build interest and create a "movement" to become a 'Habitat-Friendly Community.' The Steward defines the boundaries of the neighborhood.

To Do:

1. An Audubon-at-Home Ambassador walks the area with you and gives recommendations. You are encouraged to invite all interested residents to attend.

2. Obtain agreement of a least 60 percent of homeowners
 - 2.1. to support the formation of a “Habitat-Friendly Community” and
 - 2.2. to commit to plant at least one native plant on their property.

Phase 2 - Establishing Functional Habitat. Become an Audubon-at-Home Certified Wildlife Sanctuary.

Approximate time frame: Up to three years

An Audubon-at-Home Ambassador will award the certification once these criteria are met.

1. Progress has been made on the above healthy yard practices on community property (in the case of Track 1) or on at least 60% of properties in the neighborhood (Track 2).
2. At least 20 of the [sanctuary species](#) have been identified within the boundaries of the community.

Phase 3 - Aspirational: Achieving and maintaining the long term goal of truly functional habitat
Approximate time frame: Twenty or thirty years

- At least 70% of planted areas are occupied by native plants.
- At least 30 Sanctuary Species are in evidence.
- Storm water is contained within the communities

Getting Started - Phase 1.

Suggestions for the Community Steward(s):

Track 1 - Work with your Board, landscaping committee, and HOA management company. For information for homeowners associations, see the HOA and Condo Association page on the [Plant NOVA Natives website](#).

Speakers are available through Audubon-at-Home and Plant NOVA Natives as well as governmental agencies such as Stormwater, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Community education is a big part of this process. (See suggestions under Track 2.)

Track 2 -

- Define the boundaries of the community, which could (but does not have to) correlate with the boundaries of a previously defined area such as a homeowners association. Your neighborhood could have as few as three participants or as many as you can recruit.
- Canvas your neighbors (see suggestion for a script below).

- Build a communications platform, such as a newsletter or social media page, to keep the project in the forefront of everyone's minds.
- Identify potential allies.
- Host events, such as garden walks, National Night Out (first Tuesday in August), City Nature Challenge (April).
- Distribute educational information periodically.
- Start to make an inventory of healthy yard practices in your neighborhood.

One suggested script (There are many ways you could approach this.)

- Hi, I'm _____. I live right over there.
- I'm going around the neighborhood trying to make it safe for birds and pollinators.
- I only have one question. Would you like to support a community effort to support the birds, bees, and butterflies in our neighborhood? Our goal is to gradually improve our yards (and community property, if applicable) to make them more bird friendly.
- If so, may I add your name to our list? Once we have the residents of X number of properties involved, we get to call ourselves a 'Habitat-Friendly Community' and have a block party to celebrate. It will be held on Y date at Z location. This list is only for our own use - we won't share it with anyone.
- We are asking everyone to start by agreeing to add at least one more native plant in their yard within the next year.

Some ideas for helping your neighbors plant their first native plant

- Point out the short list of easy plants on the [Phase 1 Handout](#) (for Track 2).
- Sell or give them a copy of the *Native Plants for Northern Virginia* guide
- Direct them to www.plantnovanatives.org and the plant search app.
- Consider having a planting weekend and provide the plants. A flat of *Asclepias tuberosa* plugs could do the trick, or perhaps a *Lonicera sempervirens* or some other plant for everyone's mailbox.

Things you might want to bring when canvassing

- [Phase 1 Handout](#) - feel free to adapt it for your neighborhood
- [Sign-Up Sheet](#) - with clipboard and pen
- A hat or a T-shirt to identify yourself may be helpful. For instance, you could order a T-shirt that says "Ask me about native plants!" from the Plant NOVA Natives [CafePress store](#).
- A copy of the [Native Plants for Northern Virginia](#) guide
- A map of the neighborhood where you can color in the participating properties. You can find those on your county's websites.
- Photos of very neat-and-tidy native plantings, such as [this one](#) which is only shrubs, or [this one](#) which shows a very simple plant palate, or [this one](#) that shows the very easy step of simply plunking down trees in the middle of lawn. (More can be found in [this folder](#).)

