

Wildlife Brush Shelters

Content from "Wildlife Brush Shelters - The Missing Piece of the Habitat Puzzle" by Kevin Munroe, Reston Association

Imagine if you could attract chipmunks and weasels, turtles and lizards, towhees and wrens all with one simple structure that fits in the corner of your yard. You can! It's called a wildlife brush shelter and you probably already have the materials necessary to build one.

Placing a wildlife brush shelter on your property can add an interesting and important element to your backyard habitat, attracting a wide variety of wildlife that may have been missing. **Providing dense, heavy and secure shelter close to the ground** can attract many animals that may not feel comfortable in even the most colorful butterfly garden or thoroughly landscaped yard.

Wildlife Attracted By Brush Shelters

The variety of wildlife you may see using your brush shelter over the years is long and impressive:



- Flycatchers and dragonflies perch on the tips of branches "hawking" for flying insects.
- Salamanders and shrews hide under logs at the base.
- Lizards and butterflies sun themselves on the surface.
- Rabbits, turtles, juncos and sparrows use the tangled branches for temporary shelter.
- Toads, mice and ground beetles will come and go as will the skunks, snakes and quail that feed on them.
- Woodpeckers will pick insects out of the more decayed wood while foxes set up dens underneath.

How to Make a Brush Shelter

Building a wildlife brush shelter is quick, easy, involves little to no cost and is lots of fun. The concept is simple: build a sturdy structure out of logs and branches that provides shelter while still allowing enough spaces for animals to move around. Your goal is to provide a topography of nooks and crannies, a fortress of crevices and interlocking branches to provide hiding places for dozens of animal species.

1. Start by building a strong base with large logs, six to ten feet long and four to six inches in diameter. Stack and crisscross them in a manner that's sturdy and provides a variety of runways and spaces. (Imagine an animal the size of a rabbit being able to navigate through your structure).

2. After using half a dozen or more logs to build a sturdy base, simply start adding large branches crisscrossed in a slightly tighter mesh than the logs.
3. Continue adding more branches of a gradually smaller diameter and a denser, more compact weave.

Your end product will be a dome-like structure. The dimensions of an average brush shelter are approximately 10 feet across and five feet high. However, if you're dealing with limited space a shelter half that size made with smaller brush will still attract a variety of critters. Someone with a larger property may want several shelters twice that size.

Your wildlife brush shelter is now ready for occupancy for a myriad of local wildlife. Time to sit back and enjoy the parade of color, life and interesting behavior that wildlife often provide. With this simple addition you've helped complete the local food web bringing a more complete natural cycle to your backyard habitat!

More Brush Shelter Tips:

- Some communities do not allow brush shelters, and some neighbors might not understand their value. Check your local codes and notify your neighbors if the brush pile will be highly visible.
- Place your shelter on the edge between two habitats - these "ecotones" house the most wildlife.
- Make sure at least half of your shelter receives direct sunlight - many animals love to bask.
- Use stone piles in your shelter as part of the base to create hiding places and along the edges to serve as basking sites.
- Plant native flowering/fruited vines to sprawl over the shelter to attract hummingbirds and songbirds.
- Weave evergreen branches into the roof of your shelter in the winter to provide cover from snow/ice storms.
- Add old pipes to your shelter's base to serve as tunnels for rodents, reptiles and amphibians.