

Keeping a Salamander-friendly Yard

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During this Year of the Salamander, make an effort to create a welcoming habitat for salamanders right in your yard.

Salamanders have been disappearing at alarming rates in recent years. The decline of these amphibians can be attributed to a number of human activities, including habitat destruction and increased chemical pollution. Homeowners and landowners can take several measures to ensure that salamanders find hospitable conditions in yards or nearby wetlands.

If you are tired of the pressures of keeping a perfectly manicured yard, fostering salamander habitat can serve as your environmentally friendly excuse to not rake leaves and also have a lawn that is not “putting green” pristine. Salamanders, along with other amphibians and reptiles, rely on leaf litter for cover and moisture. Simply allowing fallen leaves

for safe drinking water. When homeowners use these herbicides or other popular lawn care chemicals, salamander habitat is immediately compromised. Compost and leaf matter are organic alternatives for supplying lawns with necessary nutrients. To reduce run-off from entering low-lying salamander habitat, the installation of impervious surfaces, such as concrete walkways, should be avoided. Lastly, if you happen to live near a stream or river, native vegetation planted along stream and riverbanks can absorb runoff before it enters the waterway. Increased streamside vegetation also provides the shade necessary to protect salamander eggs from ultraviolet rays.

Leaving a lawn unkempt and strewn with leaves, logs, and branches will attract salamanders, but homeowners can be even more proactive in their approach to creating salamander habitat by building a brush shelter. Brush shelters are intentional ecosystems erected to attract a variety of local wildlife. To construct a brush shelter, start by stacking and criss-crossing logs for a base. The log foundation will provide the necessary moisture, coverage, and insects for salamander habitat. On top of the logs, weave branches, sticks, and twigs together, creating a dome like structure. The frame of the brush shelter is then covered with

leaf litter, and sometimes conifer branches for extra warmth in winter. The resulting mass is a protective, thriving environment with a variety of interesting features to attract everything from salamanders to rabbits and birds.

In spring, many salamanders will migrate to temporary pools formed by the accumulation of rainfall and snowmelt in low-lying areas to breed (also known as vernal pools). What may look like an unattractive, muddy stain on spring’s vibrancy is, in reality, a key ecological phenomenon in the reproduction of salamanders. If a vernal pool occurs in your yard, allow the pool to live out its temporary existence and welcome a new generation of salamanders into your new, salamander-friendly yard.



Leaf litter and fallen logs are important components of salamander habitat.



Temporary pools, also known as vernal pools, are the life-blood for most salamanders in Connecticut.

Studies have shown that broad spectrum herbicides containing glyphosate are highly toxic to salamanders.

to run their natural course of decomposition can create nutrient rich leaf litter in your yard. This leaf litter will provide the ideal habitat for a plethora of insects and earthworms, supplying salamanders with an important food source. Along with providing food and shelter, leaf litter can increase the soil’s water retention abilities by up to 50%, creating the damp environment salamanders thrive in. Leaf litter also will function as an important salamander-friendly replacement for synthetic lawn fertilizers.

Salamanders are direct recipients of toxic runoff from widely-used lawn care chemicals. The combination of having permeable skin and living in low-lying wetlands makes salamanders highly vulnerable to the threats of pollution. Synthetic lawn fertilizers and herbicides used by households contribute to nonpoint source pollution that enters waterways and destroys salamander habitat. Studies have shown that broad spectrum herbicides containing glyphosate are highly toxic to salamanders at levels below the Environmental Protection Agency’s standards