



Four Seasons of Wildlife Gardening

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

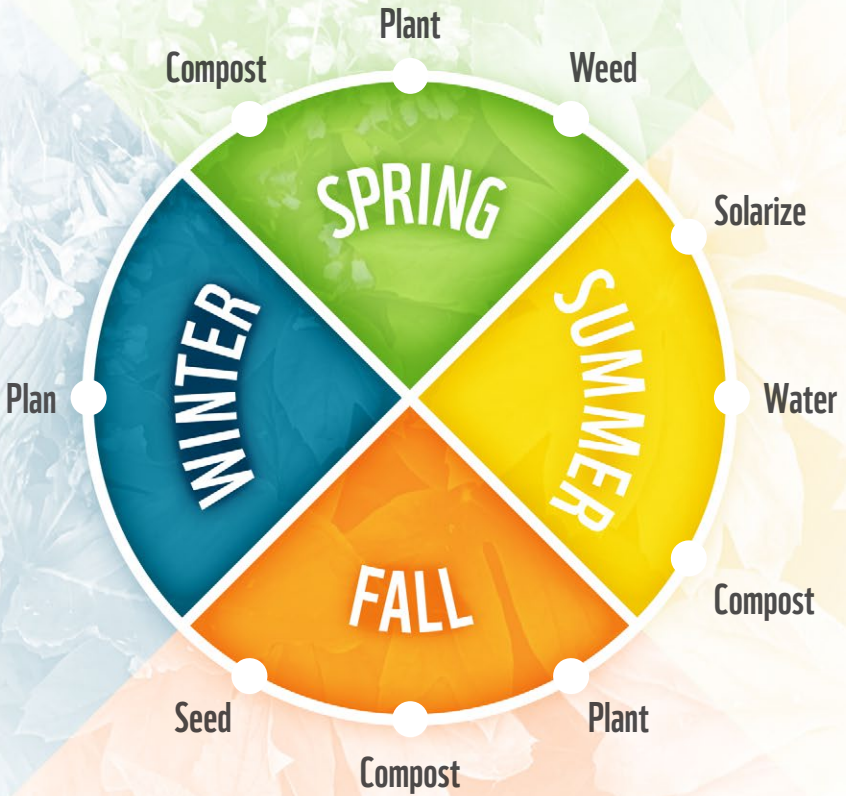


*Carolinian
Canada*



How to use this guide

This four-season guide allows you to start gardening at any point in the year. Just pick your starting season on the wheel and continue clockwise through your first year. After that, use the wheel to remind you of the key ecological gardening actions in each season.



Why garden with wildlife in mind?

Your garden is critical to restoring habitat and building a healthy ecosystem for both wildlife and people. When you fill your garden with plants native to your local environment, you're helping biodiversity thrive. When we all do it, we're helping to grow Canada's biggest wildlife garden.

Planning

1 Choose Plants

Plants native to your region are the best options for attracting and supporting wildlife. Visit our site inthezonegardens.ca to find books, webpages and apps that will help you choose plants best suited to your garden. If in doubt, experiment! You'll learn a lot by trying out different plants in your garden and observing them over time.

2 Find Plants

Visit our site inthezonegardens.ca/where-to-find-native-plants-ontario to find native plant nurseries near you. The growers at these nurseries are experts in choosing the right plant for the right spot. Describe your garden conditions to them and they will set you up for success.

3 Gather Materials

At a minimum, you will need:



Shovel



Trowel



Stiff rake



Watering can
(or hose)



Compost

Ready, Set, Garden!



Seed

Rake bare soil to loosen the top 3–5 cm; scatter native plant seeds over the soil in a thin layer and press down to loosely pack the soil. Cover with fallen leaves and label the seeded area. Most seeds will germinate the following spring (in some cases, seeding can be done earlier in the year — research each species to understand their life cycles).



Compost

Spring (optional) — You can spread a small amount (~ 1L/m²) of compost evenly across your garden area to help build spongier, darker brown soil that stores carbon, absorbs water, provides nutrients, and benefits certain plant species. Native plants grow in lots of different soils, so you may not need to do this depending on your garden type.

Summer — When weeding, pruning or thinning overgrown plants, toss the dead plant material back into the garden to decompose and add nutrients back to the soil. You can also create a compost area for this, adding kitchen scraps to make a richer organic mix.

Fall — Leave fallen leaves in the garden to make a protective layer for your plants during winter (leaf mulch). This layer will also protect hibernating butterflies and other insects. Leave dead plant stems (especially hollow and pithy stems of different sizes) in the garden to provide homes for native bees.



Plant

Add native plants that are appropriate for your garden conditions (light, moisture, soil). If you are unsure, try a variety of different species and observe which ones do better over time; they will tell you what kind of ecosystem you have. To attract more pollinators, plant some larger clumps and some solo plants and aim to have blooms from early spring through late fall.



Plan

Research, read and talk with other gardeners; map out your garden area and the conditions (light, moisture, soil, etc.). Learn about the kind of native plants that work for your conditions and the ecosystems nearby. Connect with local native plant nurseries. If you gardened last year, review your photos and notes, and write down your “lessons learned” including major successes and failures.



Solarize

If you want to create a new garden bed, you can use the sun’s heat to “bake” your soil so that all existing plants and seeds will be killed. Cover the area (e.g., a section of lawn) with a tarp, thick dark plastic or layers of cardboard, and weigh that down with heavy objects. Leave this for at least six weeks or until the plants underneath have turned yellow/brown and look dead. Remove the tarp, rake the area and add your new plants or seeds.



Water

During the 4–6 weeks after planting, water plants every day or two (unless it rains). As they grow deeper roots, you can wait longer between watering and leave it mostly to natural rainfall. Once the plants are established (after their first full year), water only during severe droughts when you see plants wilting or leaves turning brown and crispy.

Let nature be your guide. Join **In the Zone** to get free garden guides, easy-grow plant lists, expert advice and more.

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