

SPECIAL SECTION

GOING





Full of life and beauty, the ecologically driven garden is the antidote to our increasingly urbanized world. In this **38-page** special section we share why and how you can bring the wonders of biodiversity into your garden.

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ONCE UPON A
TIME, ALMOST
ALL GARDENS
WERE RATHER
MANICURED.

Lawns were cut short and uniform, edges were bold and crisp, and borders were ruffled with brightly colored flowers coaxed from evenly tilled, bare earth. Gardens had to be neat and tidy. Today, the focus has shifted to creating gardens that are nurturing—that provide shelter and sustenance for both people and wildlife. Gardens are being designed with layers of vegetation that mimic actual woodlands, creating beautiful habitats for people as well as other mammals, birds, insects, and reptiles. Many gardens now have areas where ground is covered by a dense carpet of native plants that provide for wildlife. Leaves are even being left on the ground right where they fall. Some of this might, from the old way of looking at things, appear unkempt. Not any longer. The ecologically driven garden has arrived.

In an increasingly urbanized world where so much of the landscape is intensely managed, more and more of us want to have a nurturing space that's filled with life close to home—in fact, right outside our homes. And why wouldn't we? The benefits of being in spaces with a diversity of plant, insect, bird, reptile, and small mammal

life are great—and go well beyond making people feel better. A recent article in *National Geographic* by Florence Williams titled “This Is Your Brain on Nature” highlights the ways in which more wild environments (wildlife refuges, state and federal parks, biodiverse gardens) actually affect the brain. Citing work by David Strayer, professor of cognition and neural science at the University of Utah, Williams explains, “It’s the visual elements in natural environments—sunsets, streams, butterflies—that reduce stress and mental fatigue. . . . Such stimuli promote a gentle, soft focus that allows our brains to wander, rest, and recover.”

We can create such environments right outside and even within our homes. Gardeners, landscape designers, botanists, ecologists, entomologists, and horticulturists have been prominent advocates for staying connected to the places, plants, and animals we evolved with. They are helping us move toward a future where we live surrounded by abundant life.

Though approaches vary around the U.S., we can learn a great deal from leaders in the burgeoning field of ecological gardening. Landscape architect Darrel Morrison gives tours in nature reserves so visitors can observe plants in their native habitats. During these tours he gleans ideas for his own gardens, which he designs in a manner he calls “stylized nature.” Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle*, promotes the psychological benefits of connecting with and living in more wild spaces. He helps us imagine what this could look like. Then there are the scientists who help us understand the science and benefits behind the creation of wilder gardens. In his own yard and in his books, Doug Tallamy shows us what the world could look like if we design landscapes where birds, frogs, butterflies, bees, and all the many forms of life can flourish. And this picture wouldn’t be complete without designers such as Steve Martino, who has been designing refined native gardens for more than 35 years. His work shows us that ecologically focused gardens don’t have to be messy; they can be architecturally exciting, horticulturally compelling, and full of life.

But what is an ecological garden exactly? And what if your yard has suffered years of damage, leaving it far from being an ideal habitat for you or wildlife? Can the wounds be reversed? And how do we make gardens that are designed for and accessible to people? We turned to experts—18 leading designers, scientists, authors, and advocates who are leading the charge in the development of ecologically informed gardens. In the pages that follow, you’ll find out how they answer these tough questions and what you can do to fill your garden with biodiversity and beauty.

Christy Ten Eyck transformed this front yard from a lawn and asphalt driveway into an oasis with bird- and butterfly-friendly native plants and a rainwater-harvesting garden of fruit trees, herbs, and vegetables. See more images at gardendesign.com/teneyck.

