

Position Statement Regarding *Habitat Gardens*



We assert, as a conservation non-profit organization based in Louisiana, that all property owners and managers should adhere to best practices for conservation of land and water as crucial wildlife habitat. Our primary objective is to provide evidence-based support for all Louisiana residents wishing to responsibly manage property for ecological resilience, regardless of whether the property is in urban, suburban or rural areas.

We are motivated by unequivocal research that shows that the development of residential, commercial, agricultural and transportation infrastructure has fragmented land and reduced biodiversity (1,2,3,4). Declines in native plant populations and diversity and use of pesticides has led to declines in bird, insect and amphibian populations (1,2,3).

Research has also shown that conservation steps taken by ordinary citizens can go a long way to slow declines and reconnect habitats to expand functional ecosystems (1,2,3,4,5). Furthermore, research on urban planning and economics of development have shown that preserving and restoring ecologically functional landscapes increases property values and improves public health (5).

Common landscaping habits do little to conserve habitat compared to the following recommended practices:

- Incorporate plants native to Louisiana in the landscape.** Native plants should make up at least 70% of the biomass of a landscape if it is to provide adequate ecological services (6). Native oaks and maples support over 600 species of butterfly and moth larvae (and therefore birds) (7). Non-native plant varieties commonly available in the nursery trade support fewer insects and birds (8).
- Control invasive non-native species.** Some species introduced for garden interest have escaped into the wild and impaired habitats. Many have been designated invasive threats by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries: Chinese tallow trees, Japanese honeysuckle vine, coral ardisia, water hyacinth and Chinese privet. We advise Louisiana citizens not to buy, propagate or share these plants, and to plan to replace adapted non-natives over time.





✓ **Reduce the size of lawn to the area needed for recreation.** If lawn space isn't needed for play or other specific uses, transitioning some of that space to landscaping with native plants will encourage beneficial ground-dwelling insects, add layers of bird shelter, and reduce water runoff (9). Emissions from gas-powered equipment harm air quality and contribute noise pollution to our neighborhoods.

✓ **Apply chemicals as sparingly as possible.** Only a tiny fraction of applied fertilizer is taken up by plants; the rest runs off into waterways, contributing to toxic blooms and dead zones. Broad-spectrum insecticides repel and may harm many non-targeted insects including those that provide important services, such as pollinators. Street fogging programs, once used to combat mosquito-borne diseases, have been shown to be cost-ineffective, limited in reach, toxic to humans, and disruptive to natural biological control. Residential mosquito repellent systems, while not directly harmful to humans, repel insects that provide natural biological control of mosquitoes.

We provide this information to dispel incorrect assumptions that may be held about beautification programs, weed laws, property values and Homeowner Association rules. We encourage free distribution of this document and the associated **Communication Toolkit** to decision-makers and stakeholders in protection of nature, even that in our backyards.



References

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