Habitat: Preserving What We Need
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It is a time of plenty. Our gardens overflow with herbs and flowers though most of the food plants are still in their adolescence, roots burrowing blissfully in the natural compost that tops their beds. Thick mulch helps protect them from too much sun, rain and competition from the undesirables that we call weeds.

Last year’s wild brown rabbit continues to browse our gardens—still cautious but reassured by our behavior last year. She has brought her children. Our salad greens and vegetables are protected in their raised, fenced beds so, mostly, they feed on our tiny lawn where fine fescue vies with clover. But they have stripped the dark red lilies to short, bare stems. The yellow lilies are flourishing amid the low, prickly branches of a Japanese spreading juniper so that is obviously the right place for the red ones, too.

I love the lilies but not so much that I will wage war on creatures that visit the habitat that we have consciously constructed in our yard. Our landscape harbors many kinds of active, as well as passive, life—tall native grasses sway, flowers glow and tree leaves flicker, birds hop, bees hover, butterflies and bats flit and small mammals scurry around. All are welcome—along with almost every kind of insect and microbe—because each has its role in supporting the others, each is critical to the health of this modified mini-ecosystem. Each is important to the life of our land.

As ever reader knows, natural ecosystems throughout the world are being damaged or lost—forests, wetlands, tundra and grassy fields, to name a few—to the ever increasing appetites of *homo sapiens*. Each ecosystem is a complex, dynamic and interdependent set of *plantae, fungi, animalia* and microbes, a self-sustaining open system that relies on clean air, clean water and sunlight to power life.

Yet, even if we live in highly developed areas, we can work with nature to build modified but functioning ecologies that will create significant, though limited, refuges on our small, urban or suburban plots of land. In doing so, we help protect the diversity of life. The SITES™ (Sustainable Sites Initiative™) program, developed by the American Society of Landscape Architects, offers a comprehensive and evolving set of guidelines for building ecofriendly landscapes and adopting effective gardening practices (http://www.sustainablesites.org/report/). These same practices are recommended by the University of Maryland Extension, so you can learn about them from trained Master Gardener volunteers, particularly through the Bay-Wise program (http://extension.umd.edu/baywise).

Consider what you can do to serve as a good steward of the land.

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.
Find us on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland

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