

Helping Wildlife Survive Winter by Rebecca Lexa

As the days grow shorter and the weather cools, many wild animals are getting ready for the winter months ahead. Here are some great tips if you'd like to help them out:

One of the most important things you can do is leave your yard a little messy. Many small animals spend the winter staying warm under a blanket of leaves and other debris, and raking or mowing over your leaves can be disastrous for them. If you have to move them out of the way, create a pile in the corner of the yard instead of throwing them in the landfill or burning them. Compost heaps are great places for frogs, salamanders and garter snakes to spend the winter, too.

On those rare occasions where it gets cold enough for water to freeze, put a bucket of water outside and keep breaking the ice on top. If you have a pond or other water feature, keep its surface clear of ice, too. That way animals still have access to fresh water to drink.

Keep your bird feeders filled. Suet is a great treat in cold weather and gives many birds the calories they need to get through winter. Black bears in this area don't hibernate deeply and will often wake up periodically, which means you'll still need to bear-proof your feeders.

When it comes time to plan your gardening and yard work for next year, consider planting some native plants. Berry bushes like huckleberry and salmonberry provide food for both birds and the insects they love to eat, and many native perennials also provide necessary shelter throughout the year.