

A red lawnmower is positioned on the left side of the frame, partially obscured by a dense field of wildflowers. The lawnmower has a black handle and a black engine cover. The field is filled with green grass and numerous small, five-petaled flowers in shades of blue and white. In the background, there is a wooden fence and a large tree trunk on the right side. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

# Proper Lawn Care for Wildlife and Pollinator Conservation

Outer Banks, North Carolina



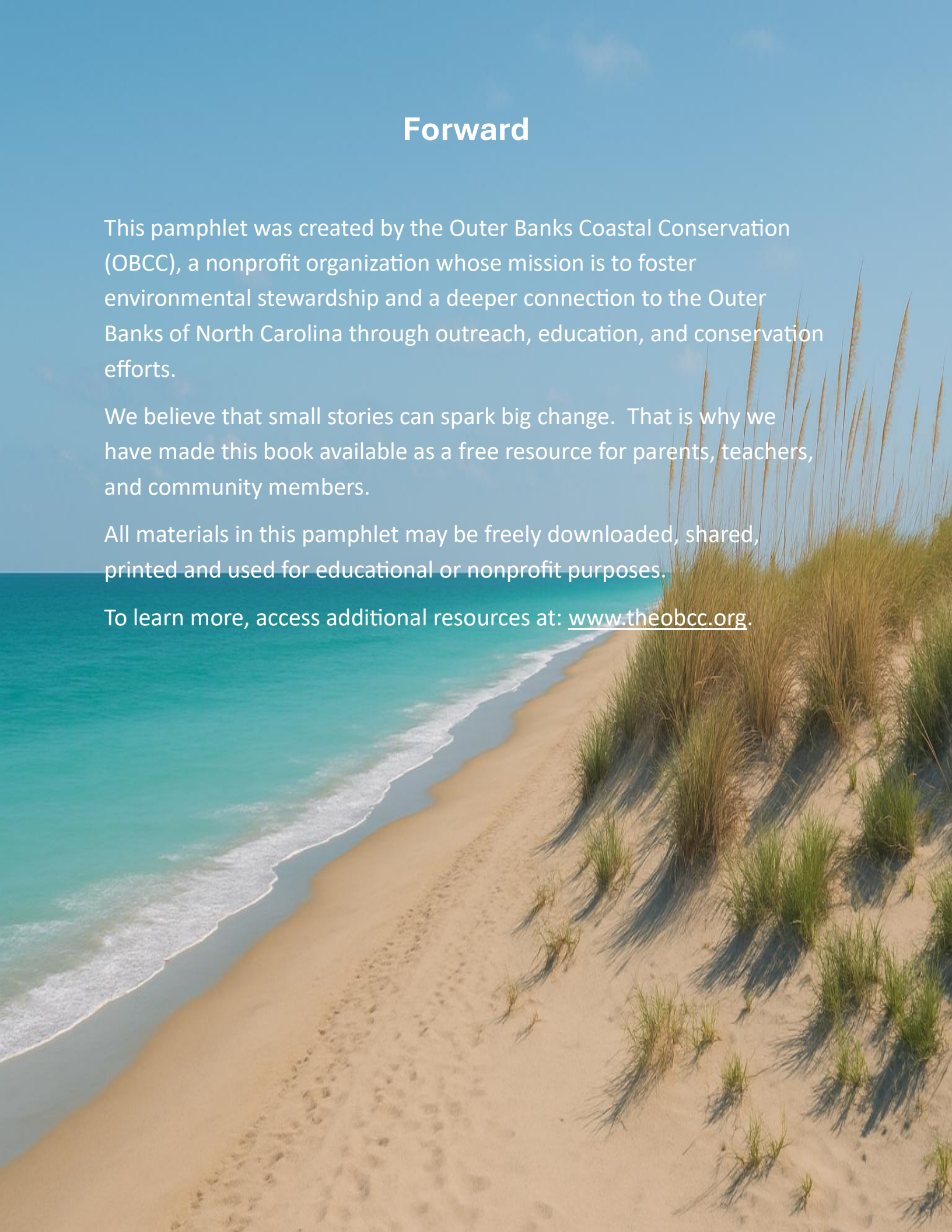
# Forward

This pamphlet was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

All materials in this pamphlet may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: [www.theobcc.org](http://www.theobcc.org).





# Introduction: Rethinking the Lawn

Across the Outer Banks and beyond, the traditional image of a bright green, closely trimmed lawn often comes at a cost to nature. Short grass offers little food or shelter for birds, butterflies, or soil organisms, and maintaining it requires constant mowing, watering, and chemical treatments that disrupt the balance of nearby ecosystems.

Yet, every yard—no matter the size—can become part of a living network that supports pollinators, birds, and beneficial insects. By rethinking lawn care practices, residents can restore soil health, create pollinator corridors, and help protect the natural beauty that makes the Outer Banks so special.

**Goal:** Transform your lawn from a sterile space into a thriving, life-filled landscape that benefits people and wildlife alike.



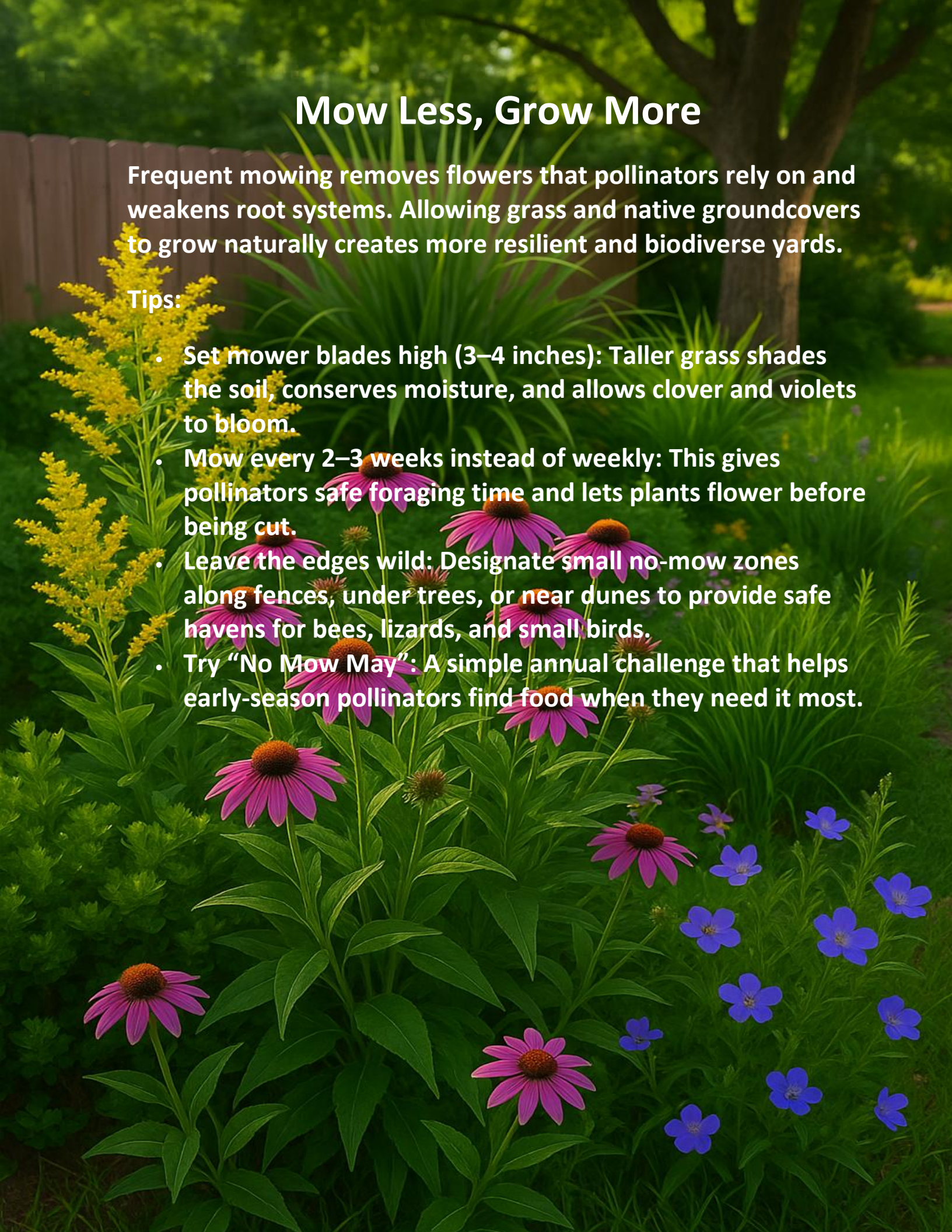


# Mow Less, Grow More

Frequent mowing removes flowers that pollinators rely on and weakens root systems. Allowing grass and native groundcovers to grow naturally creates more resilient and biodiverse yards.

## Tips:

- Set mower blades high (3–4 inches): Taller grass shades the soil, conserves moisture, and allows clover and violets to bloom.
- Mow every 2–3 weeks instead of weekly: This gives pollinators safe foraging time and lets plants flower before being cut.
- Leave the edges wild: Designate small no-mow zones along fences, under trees, or near dunes to provide safe havens for bees, lizards, and small birds.
- Try “No Mow May”: A simple annual challenge that helps early-season pollinators find food when they need it most.





# Go Native — Plant for Purpose

Native plants are the cornerstone of any wildlife-friendly yard. They co-evolved with local pollinators, birds, and soil microbes, making them perfectly suited for the Outer Banks' sandy soils and coastal climate.

## Recommended Native Plants for the Outer Banks:

| <u>Category</u> | <u>Examples</u>   | <u>Benefits</u>                                |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Wildflowers     | Black-eyed Susan, Seaside Goldenrod, Butterfly Milkweed, Bee Balm | Nectar for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds |
| Grasses         | Little Bluestem, Muhly Grass, Switchgrass                         | Shelter for insects and erosion control        |
| Shrubs          | Wax Myrtle, Yaupon Holly, Beautyberry                             | Food and cover for birds                       |
| Trees           | Red Cedar, Live Oak, Serviceberry                                 | Shade, nesting sites, and long-term habitat    |

## Design Ideas:

- Plant along the edges of lawns or driveways to create “pollinator borders.”
- Group flowers in patches—bees prefer large clusters of blooms.
- Include plants that bloom in different seasons to provide year-round food sources.



# Ditch the Chemicals, Embrace the Natural


Pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic fertilizers harm beneficial insects and pollute waterways. Even small amounts can kill pollinators or disrupt soil ecology.

## Better Practices:

- Avoid routine spraying. Use manual removal or spot treatment only when absolutely necessary.
- Encourage natural predators: Ladybugs, spiders, and birds keep pests in check.
- Use organic fertilizers: Compost, worm castings, and seaweed-based products enrich the soil without harming wildlife.
- Mulch naturally: Leaves, pine needles, or grass clippings add nutrients and protect the soil from erosion.







# Feed the Soil, Not Just the Grass

Healthy soil is alive—with bacteria, fungi, worms, and tiny decomposers that build fertility and structure. Traditional lawn care often disrupts these networks.

## Soil Care Tips:

- **Compost grass clippings:** Leave them after mowing to recycle nitrogen.
- **Add organic matter annually:** Spread compost or leaf mold in spring and fall.
- **Reduce compaction:** Avoid driving or storing equipment on grass.
- **Aerate naturally:** Earthworms and roots will do much of the work once chemicals are reduced.

*Healthy soil smells earthy, crumbles easily, and supports life above and below ground.*



# Water Wisely

In coastal regions, fresh water is precious, and runoff often flows directly into estuaries or sounds. Overwatering can leach nutrients into waterways and promote disease.

## Smart Watering Steps:

- Water early in the morning: Reduces evaporation and leaf diseases.
- Deep, infrequent watering: Trains roots to grow deep rather than shallow.
- Use rain barrels or cisterns: Capture rainfall for garden use and reduce runoff.
- Plant drought-tolerant species: Native plants like seaside goldenrod thrive with minimal irrigation.



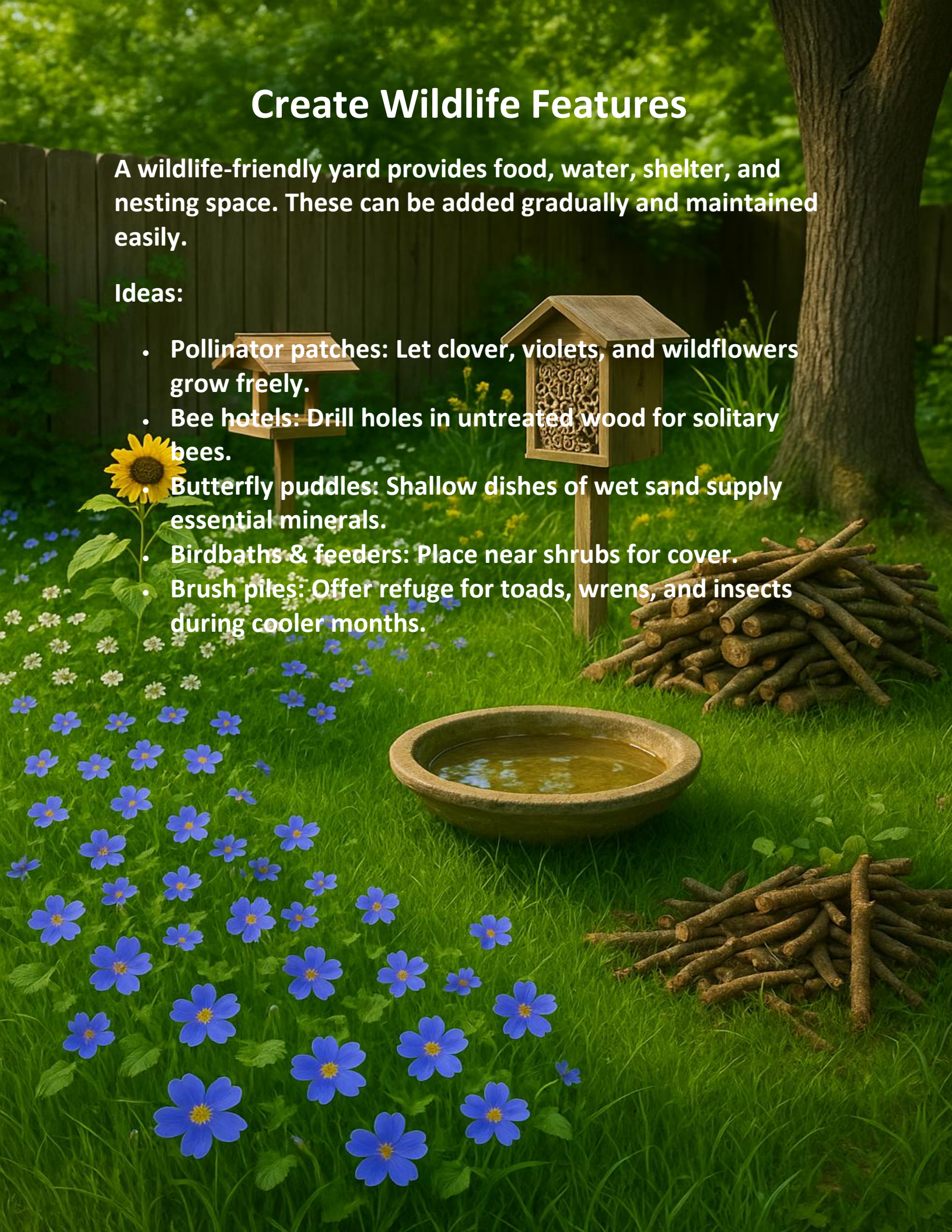


# Create Wildlife Features

A wildlife-friendly yard provides food, water, shelter, and nesting space. These can be added gradually and maintained easily.

Ideas:

- Pollinator patches: Let clover, violets, and wildflowers grow freely.
- Bee hotels: Drill holes in untreated wood for solitary bees.
- Butterfly puddles: Shallow dishes of wet sand supply essential minerals.
- Birdbaths & feeders: Place near shrubs for cover.
- Brush piles: Offer refuge for toads, wrens, and insects during cooler months.





# Limit Light and Noise Pollution

Artificial lighting and noise can confuse or repel wildlife, especially nocturnal pollinators and migrating birds.

## Simple Adjustments:

- Use motion sensors or timers instead of constant lighting.
- Choose warm-colored bulbs (under 3000K) to reduce blue light disruption.
- Direct lights downward, not toward the sky.
- Limit loud yard equipment—hand tools or electric trimmers are quieter and cleaner.





# Seasonal Stewardship

## Spring:

- Avoid raking too early; many bees overwinter in leaf litter.
- Start compost piles with yard debris.
- Prune shrubs after nesting season begins.

## Summer:

- Maintain diverse blooms for pollinators.
- Water deeply during dry spells.
- Continue to mow sparingly and leave grass clippings as mulch.

## Fall:

- Leave seed heads for birds.
- Mulch fallen leaves into garden beds.
- Plant perennials or native grasses for next year's pollinators.

## Winter:

- Keep stems and stalks standing until spring; many species overwinter inside them.
- Provide water when ponds or birdbaths freeze.
- Reduce lawn size by converting unused sections into native plant gardens.





A suburban street scene with houses, trees, a bird in flight, a butterfly, and a deer. The scene is set in a lush green environment with a paved road curving through it. In the background, there are several houses with light-colored siding and dark roofs. A large tree stands in the center of the road. A bird is flying in the sky above the trees. A butterfly is visible on the left side of the road. A deer is standing in the grass on the right side of the road. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

# Engage Your Community

Sustainable lawn care grows stronger when communities participate. By leading through example, you can inspire neighbors, schools, and local leaders to embrace pollinator-friendly practices.

## Ways to Get Involved:

- Share seeds or native plants with neighbors.
- Host a “Yard for Wildlife” workshop or demonstration.
- Encourage HOAs to relax mowing or pesticide rules.
- Install educational yard signs: *“This Yard Supports Wildlife.”*
- Partner with local organizations like the NC Coastal Federation or 4-H clubs for youth stewardship projects.
- migration and species survival.



# The Bigger Picture: Connecting Yards to Ecosystems

Each small yard is a piece of a greater ecological puzzle. Together, wildlife-friendly lawns create corridors that link dunes, marshes, and forests—critical for pollinator migration and species survival.

By managing your lawn with nature in mind, you become part of a coastal conservation movement that stretches from backyard to barrier island. Healthy yards filter stormwater, prevent erosion, and feed the insects that sustain fish, birds, and the ecosystems we all depend on.





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