

**1** lived the first 60 years of my life on the west side of the Cascade Mountains where the landscape is lush and green, and gardens contain the requisite rhododendrons, azaleas, tulips, roses, and manicured lawns.



Moving to Central Oregon 17 years ago, I dutifully enrolled in the Oregon State University Extension Master Gardeners program because I realized I knew nothing about gardening on the “dry side,” and I loved to garden. But I didn’t get the message those many years ago, and continued my westside ways with a few minor alterations.

Almost two decades later, the Central Oregon environment, with its native dry soil and roaming wildlife, has convinced me to not replace the deer fencing around what used to be typical “wet side” perennial beds and the now sickly lawn (due to my desire to not use chemical fertilizers). It started when I stopped removing dandelions from the lawn after I read they are one of the first food sources for bees in the spring.

**American goldfinches at backyard bird feeder in the winter.**



Story and

Mother Nature has made me a believer in the importance of my fitting into her landscape. Seeing as how lawns cover at least 50,000 square miles of the U.S., in my little backyard I can at least do my part to restore the native ecosystem around my house. The deer have been trying to tell me that ever since I moved in by cooperatively eating my non-native planting choices. My perennial beds have died out due to native soil conditions, the deer, and the underground critters that actually had the audacity to pull the plants down into the ground.

This is the year I finally decided to join forces with Mother Nature

and begin to transform my backyard into a biodiverse world of native plants suited to the environment, able to provide food, shelter, water, and a place to raise their young for insects, pollinators, birds, rodents, and mammals while reducing/eliminating the need for excess watering and the use of nonorganic fertilizers.

Online can be found a myriad of resources that explain the why and how of building wildlife habitat by using native plants. Simply google either term. A whole world will open up. The Deschutes County OSU Extension office website is home to helpful local information on the topics (<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/>)

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