Observations in a Peaceful Garden

Photo by Donna Legare, Native Nurseries: A backyard bird garden provides a peaceful retreat.

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When memories of September 11th, 2001 come along every year, a quiet place becomes a retreat for contemplation of our complex world. Greenways, state parks and national forests are all great escapes, but usually involve time and burning fossil fuel to get there. I don’t like wasting either.

I enjoy simply walking out the door into the private retreat my wife and I have created in our back yard. I prefer a private, enclosed ‘cocoon’ of a garden, buffered from my great neighbors by good hedges. Others may prefer wide open expanses of lawn with distant views. Whatever your ideal of a quiet spot, now is the time to create it!

The major features in our back yard are large hedges that provide a beautiful yet functional buffer from the outside world. Fences serve the same purpose and some are striking, but I prefer the softness and visual interest that a variety of shrubs affords. Also shrubs can grow taller than fences. Flowers, fragrance, and cover and berries for wildlife are additional advantages. Since we live in the shade of live oaks and pines, the hedge plants are azaleas, Sasanqua camellias, Ocala anise, agarista, needle palm and sweet viburnum. Oakleaf hydrangeas and blue hydrangeas add spring and summer color to the border, along with dogwood trees and a Japanese magnolia.

If your yard is sunny, more plant options are available for attracting butterflies and hummingbirds. A bench in a strategically located spot of shade would be a wonderful place to relax and observe nature in a beautiful setting. If you want to create screens in the sun, dwarf Burford holly, abelia, pittosporum, yaupon holly, saw palmetto and Fakahatchee grass are options. If you desire more shade, plant a variety of trees to create a cooler space and add other dimensions to your refuge. The trees may add flowers, wildlife food, and nesting opportunities for birds.
The focal point of our back yard is a bird garden. It is the landscape feature where a simple cement bird bath bowl, perched upon a rock, sits among bluestem palmettos, Virginia sweetspire and ferns. A nearby blue beech tree provides abundant jumping off places for cardinals, chickadees, woodpeckers and other birds to visit both the bird bath and the bird feeder. We sit on a small patio or inside in our family room watching birds coming and going. Viewing your garden from indoors through large windows extends your enjoyment of the garden during inclement weather and mosquito season.

So if you want to turn part of your yard into a refuge to enjoy in difficult times, it is a simple process. Begin anywhere, but just get started. Before you realize it, you will have your own peaceful refuge just beyond your door.

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