

# One Step at a Time

Have you ever felt like you have a mountain to climb with all your goals and dreams? It can be overwhelming, right? But have you ever paused and thought about taking it one step at a time? This simple yet powerful approach can be your daily motivation to keep you going on your journey toward a more beautiful, more eco-friendly yard. Let's delve into how you can transform your space, one step at a time.

## Step 1: Unleash Your WHY

Your “why” is more than just a motivational quote or mantra. It's an idea that highlights the importance of, and reasons for transforming your yard. Utilizing this approach enables you to keep the end in mind while focusing on the present moment and what you can do right now to move closer to your objectives. There is a learning curve to nature, and some things will even need to be unlearned. Like the crazy idea that keeping your yard “weed-free” is a good thing\*\*. Keeping your ‘why’ close by will aid you in your journey by guiding your design decisions and by keeping up motivation.

My WHY - The land is where conservation starts, and every inch counts. As someone who cherishes nature, I witness its health declining each day. One of the main reasons for the fall of species today is habitat loss. I am determined to raise awareness about what we can do to combat the damage that governments and businesses have done and continue to do.

## Step 2: Pick a good habit, or two, or three

To kick stale habits to the curb, we must crowd them out with new, beneficial habits.

Below are some simple habits that will help make your gardens and yard more eco-friendly.

**Remove invasive species:** Some garden plants can threaten the natural environment when left uncontrolled. By replacing these invasive plants with native ones, you can help to restore balance to the ecosystem and protect biodiversity. Native plants have evolved to live in a specific environment and are often well-adapted to the local conditions. By planting native plants, you can create a habitat that supports local wildlife, such as birds and insects, which in turn can help to pollinate plants and control pest populations.

**Mow less often and mow higher:** Lawns don't typically offer much wildlife support. They are often nothing more than a monoculture of non-native grass. When possible, replace them entirely, or as large of a section as possible, with native plants. If you must maintain a lawn, mowing it at a height of 4" or higher can reduce damage to wildlife and limit drought stress on your lawn.

**Lights out:** Reducing outdoor lighting at night can help prevent light pollution, which often confuses moths (the [pollinators of the night](#)) and can even lead to their death. The presence of floodlights and streetlights can turn what was once a safe pathway for a mother possum and her babies into a dangerous or even lethal one. This is because the bright lights make it easier for predators to locate and prey on them.



The red-banded hairstreak is one of many butterflies that depend upon leaf litter as part of their life cycle. (Photo: John Flannery / Flickr)

**Leaf it alone:** Allow your leaves to naturally break down in your garden or compost them on-site. Raking them off impervious surfaces like your driveway can prevent excess nutrient runoff into streams. However, leaving them on the soil can create habitat and improve soil health. If you're not ready to fully break the habit of raking in the fall, try raking the leaves into your flower beds. Leaves make a great, natural, and free mulch. Note, that it's not just the nutrients people throw away when they bag leaves and send them to the landfill. The leaves are home to the eggs of many invertebrates, including some butterfly species.

**Whisper:** Noise pollution - also known as sound pollution - is the pesky spread of noise that can slam the brakes on our daily routines, whether we're human or animal. Unfortunately, most of this racket is harmful to some degree. The usual suspects behind outdoor noise around the world are humans and their pesky machines and devices, such as cars, planes, and music with too much base. Changing the gardening tools we use can drastically reduce noise pollution and make for a much calmer and more peaceful Saturday morning. Gas-powered leaf blowers, especially the kind worn on the back, pump out a whopping 80 to 90 dB (decibels). As a reference, a whisper is about 30 dB and a normal conversation is about 60 dB. Noise above 70 dB over a prolonged period of time has the potential to damage your hearing.

**Spray only water:** Choosing the right plants for your garden can reduce the need for extra watering or fertilization. Avoid spraying herbicides and insecticides, as these can harm wildlife and native plants. If you want to keep bugs out of the home, spray the interior perimeter with an insecticide meant for indoor use. This will cause the untimely demise of any poor invertebrate that unwittingly breaks that perimeter, though outside creatures will remain safe and free to live out their short yet meaningful lives.

## Step 3: Kick the outdated habits to the curb

Give old habits a kiss goodbye and welcome those fresh ones with open arms! We all have habits that mold our daily routines and pave the way for our future accomplishments and smiles. But not all habits are created equal, and some can drag us and our local ecosystem down. That's why it's crucial to give our habits a regular check-up, ditch the duds, and welcome habits that serve us better.

It can be challenging to let go of familiar habits, even if they are not beneficial. However, change is necessary to ensure our planet continues to sustain us. Embracing new habits can be an exciting opportunity to improve not only ourselves but also the lives of those critters who call our yard home.

It's important to remember that changing habits and habitats is a gradual process, and we need to be patient with ourselves and nature. We can start small and build momentum over time. Celebrate each small win, and don't be too hard on yourself if you slip up!

## Conclusion

We can all make a few cultural changes to how we treat our gardens and landscapes that help them foster more wildlife. Think of the above tips as ways to be a good neighbor to the natural world.

Keep in mind that the universe didn't pop into existence overnight. Every adventure kicks off with that first step. So, if you're feeling swamped or your target seems eons away, breathe deep and just take one step at a time while using our trusty road map. Snag a PDF of these steps by clicking [here](#). Plus, join our mailing list and stay in the loop with the newest tips and news. And, as always, I'm here to cheer you on and answer any questions. Let's rock this journey together!

## Action Item

Get ready to kick off your eco-friendly adventure and make your yard (and planet!) sparkle with health. Share your game plan in the comments below! What's your first habit to boost your garden and Mother Earth?

\*\* To learn more about why keeping your yard 'weed free' is a crazy idea, jog on over to the section titled "[What is a weed?](#)" found on the 'Learn' page.