Columbia County, PA Better Backyards Certificate Program



About the Program

The *Better Backyards Certificate* program is offered through the Columbia County Conservation District for all county residential, business, school, and municipal lands. No matter how big or small, all members in the community can play a part in helping steward our water, soil, wildlife, and other natural resources!

The goals of the certification program aim to provide habitat for the county's native flora and fauna, improve water quality and soil health, manage stormwater and erosion, reduce pollutants, and mitigate the effects of climate change. Current challenges towards achieving these goals are emerging invasive species, land and habitat disturbances, pollutants, loss of floodplains and wetlands, and a changing climate. Together we can work towards a sustainable and resilient environment for our community and future generations through simple, cost-effective conservation practices right in our own backyard!

Why participate in the Better Backyards Certificate program?

- Be a part of a county-wide initiative to steward and restore our vital natural resources
- Reduce impacts of stormwater, flooding, and erosion
- Improve our drinking water quality and other watershed resources
- Restore habitats for pollinators and other native wildlife
- Help educate friends, neighbors, and family about the importance of protecting the environment
- Save time and money on lawn care activities
- Promote a sustainable future through land stewardship and resiliency
- BONUS: Upon verification you will receive a FREE 12" x 18" yard sign that highlights your efforts (pictured at right)



How It Works

- 1) Initial site evaluation and recommendations by CCCD (optional)
- 2) Download the certification checklist (page 4) and identify desired conservation practices based on your goals for the site
 - 3) Implement conservation practices on-site
- 4) Contact CCCD to schedule a site verification and receive your *Better***Backyards Certificate!**
 - 5) Display educational yard sign on-site & maintain implemented conservation practices as needed

Certification Eligibility, Rules & Agreements

- Property must be located within Columbia County, PA
- Landowner permission required
- Open to all residential, business, school, and municipality lands
- No minimum yard size required
- Site may be urban, suburban, or rural with preference towards existing open/developed spaces
- Existing conservation practices are eligible to count for certification requirements
- Applicants must check off the minimum # of requirements to meet certification level
- Optional initial site evaluation and recommendations may be conducted by an outside source such as a PennState Master Gardener, USDA-NRCS, landscaper, forester, etc.
- Habitat management plan(s) recommended, but not required
- On-site verification by CCCD required to receive official certificate
- Agree to display certification sign publically on-site as an educational benefit
- · Continual, long-term maintenance and stewardship of site is highly encouraged
- Community or neighborly partnerships encouraged
- Must follow local municipality ordinances or work with municipality for exceptions
- Certification may be revoked at any time at the CCCD's discretion if site no longer meets requirements

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Better Backyards Certification Checklist

	 groundcovers and wildflowers 	 shrubbery (understory brush) 	o lower canopy (small-medium trees)	o upper canopy (large trees)	[] 3-4 permanently vegetated forest layers	present	[] Perennial meadow or "no mow zone"	[] Evergreen trees/shrubs present	[] Dead wood or "snags"	[] Brush, rock, or log piles	[] Bird, Bee, and/or Bat house(s)	Shelter/Nesting: choose 2+	[] Open-top rain barrel	[] Bird/Butterfly Bath C. I	[] Pond/Water Garden	[] Spring	[] Wetland	[] Stream	Water Source: choose 1+	[] Caterpillar host plants (see list on pg. 5)	(from native plants only)	[] Sources of fruits, nuts, and/or seeds	(from native plants only)	[] Sources of nectar and pollen	Squirrel feeder(s)	[] Bird, Butterfly, Hummingbird, and/or	Food Source: choose 2+	A. Habitat Stewardship B. (
		(or in process)	[] Removal of invasive species	property	[] No invasive ornamental plants on	garden	[] Mixed perennial wildflower meadow/ $\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \$	[] Flower blooms continuously Spring-Fall	o Late season bloom (3+ species)	o Mid season bloom (3+ species)	 Early season bloom (3+ species) 	[] 9+ native perennial flower species	[] 4+ native tree and/or shrub species	C. Native Plants – choose 2+		[] Maintain 3-4"+ grass height	garden area	[] Convert turf grass to a no/mow zone or	[] 25%+ tree canopy cover	[] Streamside/Riparian Buffer	streambanks	[] Permanently vegetated swales, ditches,	[] <10% impervious surfaces	impervious areas	[] Direct downspouts away from	[] Rain Barrel	[] Rain Garden	B. Clean Water / Stormwater Mgmt. – choose 2+
Signature:		Date Certified:		Address:	Landowner Name:	FOI CCCD USE OTHY			project)	[] Streambank stabilization <i>(large-scale</i>	[] Floodplain restoration (large-scale project)	[] Wetland restoration (large-scale project)	[] Orchard plantings	[] Veggie garden	[] Compost pile/bin	leaves, compost, cover crops)	[] Green mulch/fertilizers (grass clippings,	[] Annual soil tests	wintertime	[] Minimize or eliminate salt use during	avoiding critical nesting periods and spots	[] Mow lawn every 2 weeks, or as needed,	[] Raise mower height to highest setting	[] No gas-powered maintenance equipment	[] No non-organic fertilizers	[] No non-organic herbicides	[] No non-organic pesticides	D. Other Conservation Practices - choose 2+

Helpful Resources

Columbia County Conservation District - Phone: (570) 317-9491, (570) 317-9456

Email: brittney.hartzell@columbiaccd.org

Website: www.columbiaccd.org

PennState Master Gardeners - Phone: 570-316-6519

Email: ColumbiaMG@psu.edu

Recommended Web Resources:

CCCD Webinars: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZUOynZVvp5nuA8r75-7 OA/videos

Rain Gardens: https://www.thisoldhouse.com/gardening/21016338/how-to-build-a-rain-garden-to-filter-run-off

Rain Barrels: https://www.columbiaccd.org/uploads/1/2/4/0/124049437/div rain barrels.pdf

Riparian Buffers: https://extension.psu.edu/riparian-buffers-for-wildlife

Lawn Alternatives: https://extension.psu.edu/meadows-and-prairies-wildlife-friendly-alternatives-to-lawn

Pollinator Habitat: https://www.pollinator.org/PDFs/Guides/CentralAppalachianrx7FINAL.pdf

Wildlife Habitat: https://extension.psu.edu/wildlife-habitat-relationships

Stormwater Management: http://www.stormwaterpa.org/non-structural-bmps.html

Water Quality: https://www.dep.pa.gov/Business/Water/CleanWater/WaterQuality/IntegratedWatersReport/Pages/2020-Integrated-Water

-Quality-Report.aspx

Soil Health Tests: https://agsci.psu.edu/aasl/soil-testing/fertility

PA Native Plants: https://extension.psu.edu/pennsylvania-native-plants-for-the-perennial-garden

Native Plant Nurseries: https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/LandscapingwithNativePlants/BuyNativePlants/Pages/

default.aspx

Native Wildflower/Grass Seed: https://www.ernstseed.com/

Planting Choices for Specific Site Conditions: http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/

dcnr 20033685.pdf

Caterpillar/Larval Host Plants for Butterflies: https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/counties/york/maescapes/

maescapes-blog/butterfly-larval-host-plant-list

Invasive Species: https://www.invasive.org/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf

Non-point Source (NPS) Pollution: https://www.epa.gov/nps/basic-information-about-nonpoint-source-nps-pollution

Natural fertilizers: https://www.epa.gov/nps/basic-information-about-nonpoint-source-nps-pollution

Integrative Pest Management (IPM): https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/features/?

cid=nrcs143 023552

Climate Change in Pennsylvania: http://www.depgis.state.pa.us/climateChange/index.html

Neighborly Landscaping: https://extension.psu.edu/neighborly-natural-landscaping-in-residential-areas