

Land Management Best Practices



Plant Natives

Native plants provide food for caterpillars, which make up the vast majority of the diet of baby birds. Native plants require less fertilizer, water, and care than non-natives. Adding nutrients to the soil actually gives non-native plants an advantage over native ones. When choosing what to plant, try to use species that are native to your county or region of the state. For the most success in establishment, match the needs of your plants to your soil type, water amount, and sunlight. Plants can be picky!

Remove Invasive Plants

Invasive species provide little wildlife habitat and crowd out native plants. The worst species can make fundamental changes to how ecosystems function. Removing non-native plants from your property helps native plants and animals thrive. Common invasive plants in northern Virginia include: Japanese Honeysuckle, Japanese Stiltgrass, Autumn Olive, Tree-of-Heaven, and Oriental Bittersweet.



Wait to Plant Wildflower Meadows

Some native plants can be outcompeted even by other natives and it's easy to accidentally take out native plants when removing invasives. If you want a wildflower meadow, it's a good idea to wait a growing season to see what already occurs on your property before you take any major steps. There might be interesting plants waiting to be discovered! We'd be happy to come take a look.

Leave Land Unmanicured

Brush piles, leaf litter, thickets of sumac and blackberries, and fallen logs are all great habitat for insects, birds, and other wildlife. Leave dead trees standing when they are not a threat to safety or property. Woodpeckers, bats, and bugs love them! Minimize the area of lawn on your property. Lawns provide limited habitat for wildlife and require a lot of water, fertilizer, and gas for mowing.



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Avoid Mowing and Haying Large Fields from April 15th to August 1st

This is when birds nest in tall grasses and shrubs, making them vulnerable to mowers and predators. Changing your mowing and haying schedule, when possible, is a simple but important way to help declining grassland birds.



John Carrel

Minimize Soil Disturbance

Uncovered soil makes sites vulnerable to erosion and invasion by weeds like Japanese Stiltgrass. Excessive soil disturbance also releases carbon and kills soil microorganisms. If you do need to expose soil, try to plant a cover crop in the area as soon as possible.



Switch to Motion-Activated Porch Lights

Billions of insects are killed each year by lights that are left on overnight. Insect declines, partly as a result of artificial light, are an important contributor to declines of insect-eating birds like Whippoorwills, Common Nighthawks, and Barn Swallows.



Remove Covers on Brick Chimneys

Chimney Swifts, which migrate all the way from the Amazon rainforest, nest and roost in chimneys. This species has declined by 67% since 1970, partly because of the loss of suitable nest sites. Allowing swifts to nest in chimneys is not a fire hazard as long as you don't light a fire while they're nesting in the summer. Just be sure to close the damper so baby swifts don't enter your house!



About the Clifton Institute

The Clifton Institute is a non-profit organization located on a 900-acre property near Warrenton, VA. Our mission is to inspire a deeper understanding and appreciation of nature, to study the ecology of our region, to restore habitat, and to conserve native biodiversity. For more information about land management, contact Land Management Outreach Associate Marie Norwood at mnorwood@cliftoninstitute.org or 781.608.5154. For more information about the Clifton Institute, visit cliftoninstitute.org.

