

# Habitats in Your Backyard



**Concrete/Asphalt:** These hard surfaces make it difficult for oxygen and water to pass from the surface to the soil underneath. If oxygen can't make it through the surface, how can critters dig their way into the soil? Some creatures might be able to live in the cracks or travel across the concrete or asphalt, but they typically don't stay long. The darker the material, the hotter it gets when the sun starts beating down on it in the summer.

**Mowed Grass:** What looks like a beautiful, lush, well-manicured green lawn to us looks a little different to the critters that call it home. Grass that is planted for lawns often has very short roots and needs constant drinks of water and nutrients to stay green. The most common type of grass used for lawns is Kentucky Blue Grass. A typical lawn of Kentucky Blue Grass is a monoculture, meaning that no other types of plants are allowed to live in it. So for any critters who don't eat Kentucky Blue Grass leaves or roots, a habitat that contains a large amount of Kentucky Blue Grass doesn't provide much to eat.

**Unmowed Weeds or Vacant Lot:** Many tall "weeds" are actually native plants or even exotic plants that have been brought in from other continents. Many of these plants have deep roots and can live in difficult areas where Blue Grass can't survive. A habitat with several types of plants gives critters more of a variety of things to eat. Plus, those plants that have big flowers might attract insects, which could become lunch for others.

**Prairie Plants/Shrubs:** Think of these places as apartment buildings for critters. Prairie plants have lots of different parts for critters to munch, whether they eat the roots, leaves, nectar, or seeds. Shrubs offer some of the same benefits, and they also provide good shelter and hunting grounds throughout the year. The soil underneath the shrubs is shaded, creating a cool, moist place for many critters.

**Tree-Shaded Area:** The sun can heat up and dry out the soil very quickly on those long summer days, but trees can shade the soil, keeping it cooler and more moist. This makes it much easier for critters to dig through. Plus, tree roots also help prevent erosion of the soil.

**Leaf Litter-Covered Area/Forest:** When leaves fall from the trees in autumn, they will blow around until they start to get wet. Wet leaves will stick together and start to decompose, slowly turning back into organic matter in the soil. As they decompose, they create a lush nutrient buffet for decomposers of all sorts, as well as providing a nice hiding spot from the ever-lurking predators.

This worksheet supports the **Food Source Habitat** and **Ground Cover** activities on  
The Field Museum's *Underground Adventure* Web site: [www.fieldmuseum.org/undergroundadventure](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/undergroundadventure).

