

Life Beyond the Fence: Creating a Wildlife Bridge in Your Backyard

Part 2: Native shrubs and small trees

Wildlife bridge: a structure or landscape that allows safe passageway, connecting sources of habitat for wildlife

Wildlife Corridor: a living landscape of native foliage that supports and connects wildlife to each other and to ecosystem fragments

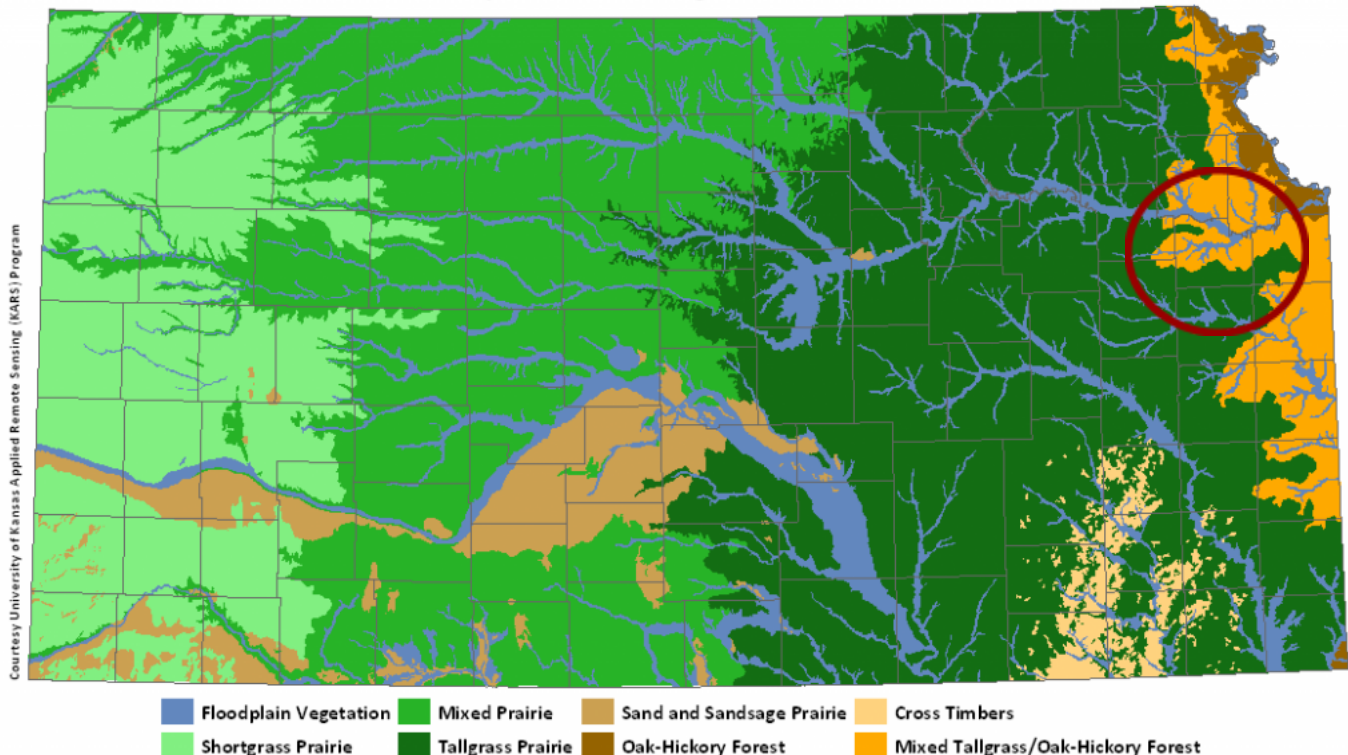
HABITAT: food → water → shelter → air → SPACE

Ecosystem: A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment; a complex network or interconnected system

Native Ecosystems of NE Kansas include:

- Oak savannah
- Mixed-grass and tall-grass prairies
- Creeks, streams, rivers and riparian zones
- Wetlands and watersheds
- Oak-Hickory deciduous forest

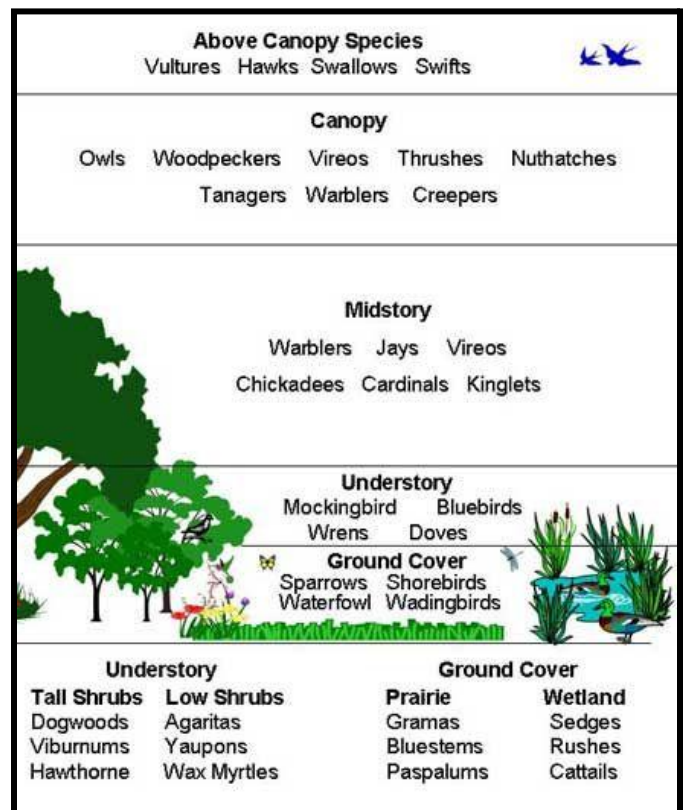
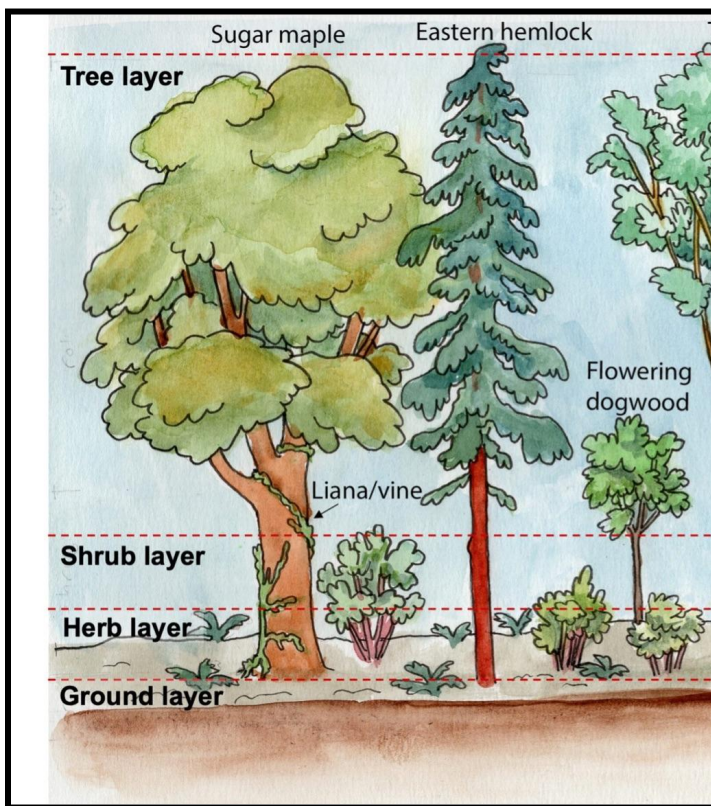
Küchler's Map of The Potential Vegetation of Kansas - Generalized



Wildlife and Ecological Relationships:

Within all of life exists a web of interconnected relationships based on cycles and seasonal rhythms. Trees and plants are the connective tissue that nourish and sustain healthy soil, air and water. One organism can play a major role in the life cycle of multiple animals and plants. For example, an oak tree has the capacity to live around 900 years. Over these 900 years (approximately 34 human generations), an oak tree becomes an underground “communication hub” connecting numerous plants in an ecosystem through a complex web of mycelium. Oak trees also support an incredible 900 species of lepidoptera (butterflies and moths). Acorns were also a vital food source for our ancestors living in the northern hemisphere.

Introduction to the shrub layer:



The shrub layer has many advantages for homeowners and wildlife in a suburban yard. Shrubs generally take up less space than trees while providing both food and shelter for neighboring wildlife. Shrubs also do not cast large amounts of shade during the day for those that wish to keep a flower or vegetable garden that needs full sun.

Brush piles can serve as a habitat and safe refuge for birds and other animals.

Planting shrubs in your yard can provide both food and shelter for wildlife. Planting shrubs in a plant community can offer more diversity and ecological balance to your wildlife space.

Healthy diversity in an ecosystem can be likened to a healthy immune system of the body.

Visualization Exercise:

1. Imagine you are floating above your home, how is your yard connected to your neighbor's? ... note the fence line, trees, bushes, etc. and describe here:
2. Now, pull back a little farther and imagine you are floating above your neighborhood, what do you notice? ...note the trees, streams, plants and describe here:
3. Come back to your backyard... note the plants, trees, low spots, high spots, wet and dry, sunny and shady and describe here:
4. What sort of wildlife have you noticed visiting your backyard? ...note birds, mammals, insects, bugs, etc. Who would you like to invite into your garden?
5. Take a moment to visualize your wildlife bridge, your wildlife refuge. Where do you see it? How does it connect to existing habitat? How can it connect?

Connecting your wildlife bridge:

1. **Explore.** Find out what already grows around you. Can you identify any trees or plants?
2. **Observe.** What types of animals do you notice in or around these places?
3. **Discover.** Where is the nearest source of water? Is there a creek or pond nearby?
4. **Connect.** Can you physically connect your wildlife habitat to existing habitat (i.e. tree canopies or along fence lines, etc.) Oftentimes, your wildlife space will become a source of inspiration for others. Engaging in conversations with neighbors or placing a sign in your yard can be enough to connect and cause ripples.

The concept of wildlife bridges and corridors can be as simple as a shift in perspective. Recognition of existing habitat is the first step. Followed by seeing how it is connected. And finally entering into a symbiotic relationship, becoming the connector.

Imagine a tattered quilt strewn about a room. In order to piece the quilt back together, we must first be able to find and recognize the pieces and patterns. Once we do, it's just a matter of stitching it back together. Or in this case, planting the pieces and letting nature do her magic!

Creating Your Wildlife Bridge!

Now is the fun part, the part where we fall in love with and choose our native shrubs!

Plant Name	Height	Light	Water	Bloom/Foliage	Wildlife Relationships
Eastern Wahoo, <i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i>	>25 ft.	part-full	Well- drained	Flowers, April-June Berries, Sept-Oct Bright red leaf color in Fall	songbirds, wild turkey, native bees, beetles, moths
What draws you to this particular plant?					

Plant Name	Height	Light	Water	Bloom/Foliage	Wildlife Relationships
Silky dogwood, <i>Cornus amomum</i>	6-12 ft.	Shade-tolerant, part-full	Moist (mulching recommended) tolerant of poorly drained	Flowers, mid-June Bluish colored fruits, Sept.	Songbirds, insects, pollinators including bees and butterflies
What draws you to this particular Plant?					
Flowering dogwood, <i>Cornus florida</i>	40 ft.	Part shade	well-drained	Flowers, early spring Fruits, Aug.-Nov.	Songbirds, wild turkey, squirrels, deer, bobwhite, insects, butterflies and moths
What draws you to this particular Plant?					
Deciduous Holly (Possum Haw), <i>Ilex decidua</i> (need 2 plants to produce berries)	15-30 ft.	Part shade to full sun	Wet or dry. Does well in rain garden	Flowers, April-May Berries, Sept.-Oct.	Birds (including bluebirds) and mammals
What draws you to this particular Plant?					

Plant Name	Height	Light	Water	Bloom/Foliage	Wildlife Relationships
Ozark Witchhazel, <i>Hamamelis vernalis</i>	10 ft. Spread, 8 ft.	Full sun	Rich, moist well-drained, soils	Flowers, Jan.-Apr. Fruits, Sept.-Oct.	Insects, beetles, leafhoppers, moths, beaver, squirrels, rabbits, turkey, deer and birds
What draws you to this particular Plant?					
American Persimmon, <i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	30-60 ft Spread, 25 ft.	Part shade - Full sun	Dry - medium, does well in rain garden	Flowers, May-June Fruits, Sept.-Oct.	Deer, opossum, squirrel, wild turkey, fox, coyote, raccoon, wild turkey
What draws you to this particular Plant?					

Preparing your site:

Cardboard and wood chips are your new best friends!

To remove stubborn lawn or grass, layer with thick cardboard (pick up at grocery stores or other recycling drop offs) and then top with local wood chips (3 inches thick). You can contact local arborists and request a load delivered to your house. For planting this year, you can cut a hole(s) in your cardboard to plant your seedlings. Cardboard and wood chips will not only break down, gifting your soil organic material, but it will also allow for fungal mycelium to be incorporated into your landscape.

Caring for your shrub(s):

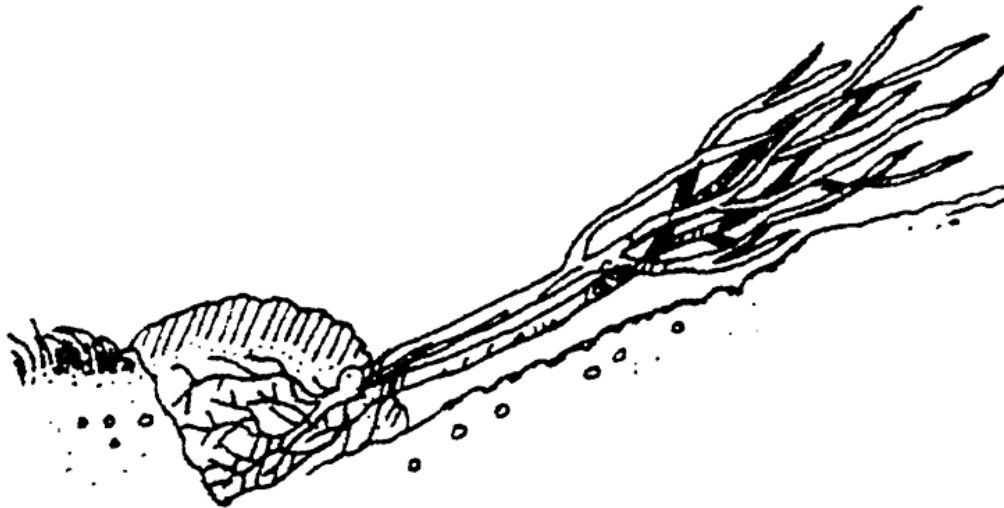
Water, water, water. From the MDC website: “Water is the single most important need for your new shrub/tree. Root development or regeneration cannot occur without adequate moisture. Be sure new trees are watered routinely for the first two years after planting. Apply enough water to keep the soil around the roots moist but not wet. Examine soil once a week during dry periods. Gravelly or sandy soils may need more frequent watering; silt or clay soils may require less.” The Missouri Dept. of Conservation also recommends mulching your shrub/tree every 2 years to conserve moisture.

Protect your shrub/tree with fencing. You can use tomato cages with chicken wire or other fencing. This is to keep them protected from getting eaten or nibbled. You can stake your new tree as well to promote vertical growth. Bamboo stakes work well. Tree tubes can be purchased in bulk from the Kansas Forest Service website (see resources).

If you need more time to prepare or choose your site, you have a couple of options. You can

1. Heel in your shrub/tree (short term, >1 month)

To do this, start by digging a sloping trench long and wide enough to hold the roots. Lay the tree in this trench, with the roots against the steep side. Then, cover the roots with soil, and soak with water. As soon as possible, plant trees in their permanent location as you normally would.



2. Pot your tree/shrub and plant as late as this fall! Make sure the pot you use is deep enough for root growth. Watering will be extra important as the soil will dry out quicker.

NOTES:

just a few FIELD GUIDES, RESOURCES & INSPIRATIONS to get you started...

- **Bringing Nature Home**, Doug Tallamy, <https://homegrownnationalpark.org>
- **Arboretum America**, Diana Beresford-Kroeger, <https://dianaberesford-kroeger.com>
- **The Global Forest**, Diana Beresford-Kroeger, <https://calloftheforest.ca>
- **Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of Kansas**, Michael John Haddock and Craig C. Freeman
- **Wild Douglas County**, Ken Lassman
- **Regeneration**, Paul Hawkins, <https://regeneration.org>
- **Vinland Valley Nursery**, www.vinlandvalleynursery.com
- **Native Lands**, www.nativelandsks.org
- **Kansas Forest Service**, https://www.kansasforests.org/conservation_trees/
- **Missouri Dept. of Conservation**, <https://mdc.mo.gov/trees-plants/tree-seedlings>
- Rachel Allai, rachelallai@gmail.com and www.patreon.com/fiddleforest