



*Gardens don't have to be wild to make great turtle habitat!*

## Taking Action in Your Community

### Education

Become an informed citizen:

- Pick up a field guide! Learn to identify the native turtle species in your area and read about their natural histories.
- Support or join your local environmental organizations and advocate for open space preservation.

### Outreach

Help build community support for turtle protection:

- Distribute this brochure in your community to create awareness around the issues turtles face and to enlist others in the fight to conserve them.
- Encourage public education and awareness about the value of wildlife. For example, invite a speaker to teach your community about native turtles.

### Municipal Planning

Get involved with your local conservation commission to advocate for strong protections for local wildlife, and encourage municipal planners to:

- Implement modifications for active construction, such as requiring turtle exclusion fencing.
- Consider habitat needs when planning roads and construction projects.
- Add sloped curbs or wildlife passage tunnels to roads to allow turtles to travel more safely.
- Require the assessment of new construction sites and utility work for existing wildlife populations.

## Additional Resources

For more information, a list of state wildlife agencies and additional ways to take action:

[www.northeastparc.org](http://www.northeastparc.org)

Learn more about managing habitat for turtles:

[www.northeastparc.org/habitat-management-guidelines/](http://www.northeastparc.org/habitat-management-guidelines/)

Build habitat in your yard:

[www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife](http://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife)

Check out the PARC National Turtle Networking Team for many other ways you can help protect turtles:

[www.parcplace.org/species/turtles/](http://www.parcplace.org/species/turtles/)



Above: newly hatched snapping turtles emerging from their nest.  
On the cover: A female eastern box turtle



Design by Melissa Vorn with Pamela Meier / Photos by Pamela Meier

# Protecting Northeast Turtles and their Habitat

## A GUIDE FOR SUBURBAN AND URBAN LANDOWNERS





## Who are the Northeast's turtles?

The northeastern U.S. is home to 67 species of reptiles. This includes 25 species of turtles, most of which are now listed as Endangered, Threatened, or Species of Special Concern. Unfortunately, after 300 million years on Earth, even common species, such as painted and snapping turtles, are in decline in some areas.

As a landowner, you can make a critical difference in protecting these vulnerable neighbors. Begin by familiarizing yourself with your local turtle species and their life cycles to understand their specific needs: your state environmental agency website is a good place to start. No two species are alike, and you need to know what you have in order to help.

## What issues do turtles face?



Most turtle species are long-lived, take at least a decade to begin to reproduce, lay a small number of eggs, and have few offspring that survive to adulthood. Given these factors, the loss of even one adult turtle can devastate a population.

There are many other elements contributing to the startling decline of these ancient creatures: illegal collection of wild turtles for the pet trade, predation of eggs and young, diseases, and climate change, to name a few. But the primary threat to turtle survival is loss of habitat due to human development, which not only destroys but separates their habitat into small, isolated pieces. This is known as habitat fragmentation. It makes dispersal—the movement of animals between populations, which is critical for genetic health—and even basic survival difficult. For example, turtles migrating to nesting sites may be killed crossing roads that intersect their habitats.



Left: Spotted Turtle. Above: An example of a turtle-friendly backyard habitat.

## What habitats do they live in?

Not all turtles live in ponds! Some turtles are semi-aquatic species, requiring both land and water environments. Each species' habitat requirements are as varied as the animals themselves.

Aquatic habitats include permanent wetlands—streams and rivers, ponds and lakes, marshes and bogs, and even brackish estuaries—as well as seasonal wetlands like vernal pools. Terrestrial habitats range from forests to fields, and may include both urban and suburban areas. Deciduous and pine forests, agricultural lands, fields and meadows, shale barrens, salt marshes, and coastal beaches are all important habitat for different turtle species at different times of the year. These habitats provide food, water, shelter, and places to hibernate and nest. Very few species use just one type of habitat, so it's vital to maintain and preserve not just a variety of habitats, but also the connections between them. Blanding's turtles, for example, nest in upland habitat and will use vernal pools extensively while traveling across the landscape.

## How you can help!

- Create habitat in your backyard by adding native plants, shallow water sources, rocks and logs.
- Create a natural debris or leaf pile for sheltering and overwintering. Pre-existing piles may already be turtle habitat, and should not be disturbed.
- Identify and responsibly manage nesting habitats:
  - Do not disturb nesting turtles or nests.
  - Preserve and protect known nesting sites.
- Maintain existing habitats like vernal pools, nesting sites, and long-standing natural water courses.
- Minimize mowing between April and November, avoid wetlands and turtle-sensitive areas, raise mower blades, and mow from the center outwards to give turtles (and other animals) a chance to escape. Detailed mowing information can be found at [www.northeastparc.org](http://www.northeastparc.org).
- Never release pet turtles or allow them to escape; they can spread disease to native turtle species. To rehome a pet, research alternative solutions in your area.
- Help turtles cross the road, but never take or relocate turtles from the wild; every individual is important to the survival of its population. Refer to your state's regulations for more information.
- Monitor dogs outdoors to prevent them from harming turtles, especially during the nesting season in May-June. Again, the loss of even one adult can spell disaster for a struggling turtle population.
- Do not leave human or pet food in your yard and securely close garbage cans to deter turtle predators, such as foxes and raccoons.
- Limit the spraying of pesticides and chemicals, and use organics if possible.



Leave the leaves! Eastern box turtles love leaf and brush piles.