



MAE scapes

Mid-Atlantic Ecological Landscapes

EDGE GARDEN

Wildlife Lives on the Edge

The Edge Garden is teeming with wildlife—occurring where the meadow ecosystem adjoins the forest ecosystem. Creatures of all sorts make use of the cover, food and nesting sites provided by plants of varying heights. Each “layer” is home to a unique set of wildlife. The edge area offers cover for shy birds venturing out of the forest to feed on berries, seeds and insects. Ground-nesting birds find sheltered nesting sites in the grasses growing at the edge. Turtles, toads, snakes and numerous insects visit and reproduce in the diverse environment.

The Wood Thrush forages for insects in the leaf litter under the forest canopy. Berries and seeds are also part of its diet. Below, a Juvenal's Duskywing alights on *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *speciosa*.



Edge Garden Signals Transition

Many of our forests were once meadowland. Over a hundred years or more, annual grasses and forbs were succeeded by perennials and biennials. Eventually shrubs and trees moved in. This garden mimics that transition and is inhabited by plants that are typical of those that exist at the sunlit edge of a forest. The amount of light and heat in a natural area dictates which plants will compete most successfully.

As grasses, shrubs and trees become taller, smaller plants are shaded out and are eventually replaced by oaks, hickories, maples and pines that we are familiar with today. This is part of the ecosystem's natural succession from meadow to forest if left untouched by the gardener's hand or the intrusion of invasive species.

Site Conditions

The MAEscapes Edge Garden faces east and receives sun until about 3 pm. The garden is bordered on two sides by the building, which protects plants from the heat of late afternoon sun and from the drying southwest winds. Moisture varies across the garden. The front edges are drier, while downspout areas can be wet after rainstorms. This site has average garden soil.

Plant Communities

Plants typical of an edge garden vary in height, making up the ground, herbaceous and understory layers. Elevation, soil type, acidity and moisture determine which plants grow together at the edge. This garden contains samples of some of the plants you would find in a natural edge area, though perhaps not in these groupings. How many of these plants are familiar to you?



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The diverse habitat of the edge supports *Vaccinium corymbosum*, Highbush Blueberry, the Redback Salamander and *Pycnanthemum muticum*, Clustered Mountainmint (with Bumble Bee).

Benefits



Creating an edge garden habitat with plants native to the area provides an added boost for many rapidly disappearing species.



The many overlapping layers of this garden minimize weed growth and reduce the use of pesticides.



The density of this type of garden provides shade and naturally conserves the water it receives. It is less likely to require watering once established.



Wildlife can find shelter, food and safety in the multiple layers and biodiversity of plants, shrubs and trees on the edge.

Establishment and Maintenance

The smaller herbaceous native plants are placed in large groups to create a corridor that provides food and shelter for wildlife. Trees and shrubs are chosen for their wildlife value of fruits and berries.

All dried plant foliage is left standing to provide food and cover through the winter. In early spring, it is broken into pieces and left on the ground where it will act as mulch and a source of nutrients.