



Amphibian and Reptile Frequently Asked Questions

#1 – General Questions

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1. General Questions

1.1 Question 1: What can I do on my property to benefit amphibians and reptiles?

This depends greatly on where you live, the size of your property and if you have any species present in the area already. For example, a property in a rural setting that is not completely dominated by row-crop agriculture will likely have a greater chance of successfully attracting species than urban or suburban properties. Furthermore, specific species have specific requirements and needs, which must be catered to if one hopes to attract them. However, there are general steps you can take that may make your yard more attractive to a variety of species.

1.1.1 General: In a very, very general sense you can reduce the amount of area you mow (most amphibian and reptile species like the cover provided by long grass or pockets of shrubby vegetation). This includes not only a reduction of mowing around your home, but also around water bodies on your property. For example, do not mow up to the banks all the way around a pond on your property or along a lake/river shoreline on your property. You can also keep fallow fields and grasslands clear of over-story vegetation. Finally, do not eliminate all brush and/or woodpiles on your property and leave fallen logs, leaf litter and other ground debris in natural areas. Many species use such debris as cover.

1.1.2 Snakes and Lizards: In general, most Wisconsin snakes and lizards prefer no, to little tree canopy, but do like ground-level cover. Not only does ground level cover offer refuges from predators and for hunting, it also gives them greater opportunities to regulate their body temperature without being exposed to potential dangers. For this reason, many species can be found in old fields, fallow fields, grasslands and prairies (especially where those habitats are near wetlands). If you wish to attract snakes and lizards to your property, maintain open canopy

parcels for them by removing over-story woody vegetation, but also leave sporadic brushpiles, woodpiles and pockets of short shrubby vegetation. However, keep in mind that some woody or invasive plant species are difficult to effectively remove. Attempting to eliminate them in an incorrect fashion can actually make the problem worse, and you should consult with someone experienced in invasive plant species removal before attempting this. Snakes and lizards may also be attracted to leaf litter piles or debris such as large pieces of sheet metal or plywood.

1.1.3 Turtles: Attracting turtles to your property depends on the type of water body you live near and whether or not your property currently possesses suitable nesting habitat.

- If you have turtles that already nest on sandy banks or open sandy soils on your property, you can benefit them by removing any woody vegetation that may be encroaching upon their nesting location, such as black locust or sand bar willow. However, keep in mind these plant species are difficult to effectively remove. Attempting to eliminate them in an incorrect fashion can actually make the problem worse, and you should consult with someone experienced in invasive plant species removal before attempting this.
- Monitoring nesting habitats during the nesting season to frighten away potential nest predators (like raccoons and opossums) can also be beneficial. You can help protect the nest from these predators by placing a wire mesh material (openings of 3 inches or slightly larger) over the area and buried several inches on each side. This will prevent predators from getting into the nest but the openings are large enough so that the hatchlings can exit the area once they emerge. Keep in mind that the eggs of some species hatch in several months, while the hatchlings of some species are able to overwinter in their nests and do not emerge until the following spring.
- Wetlands, ponds or lakes will likely attract painted turtles, snapping turtles, stinkpots/musk turtles and, occasionally, Blanding's turtles. You can benefit these wetland species by not mowing up to the bank of the wetland. Also, leaving (or adding) several large, sturdy logs in the water perpendicular to the shoreline to act as basking sites for turtles will also benefit them.
- Rivers will be home to painted, musk and snapping turtles, but also potentially three species of map turtle, and two species of softshell turtle. Herbaceous vegetation along the river shoreline should be allowed to grow in, and should not be mowed repeatedly (although it shouldn't be allowed to turn into a dense tangle of shrubs either). Fallen logs and/or snags in the water can provide critical underwater habitat and above the water basking opportunities for many turtle species and should *not* be removed.
- Also, if you notice threatened or endangered species nesting or active on your property, please report your observation to the WDNR using the following online reporting form: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/endangeredresources/forms.html>.

1.1.4 Frogs and Salamanders: First, it is usually necessary to have a stagnant water body (wetland, pond, lake) associated with, or on your property to attract large numbers of amphibians. Natural water bodies are usually more effective, but artificial ponds may also attract these species. Frogs generally prefer ample emergent vegetation around the periphery of a water body (such as cattails, or bulrush) for breeding and as resting places during the non-breeding season. Salamanders will also lay their eggs on emergent vegetation. How to manage the upland habitat associated with the wetland to attract these species depends on what you want to attract, and if that species is found in your particular area of the state. Wood frogs, newts, spotted salamanders, and often spring peepers, usually prefer a semi-mature to mature woodland with ample ground debris (rotting logs, leaves and sticks). Other species require open grasslands that are not

frequently mowed (leopard frogs, tiger salamanders and chorus frogs). Also, if you would like amphibians to thrive in your pond, **do not** stock it with game fish (bass, bluegill, pumpkinseed, etc.). These fish eat adult amphibians, as well as their eggs and larvae.

NOTE: If constructing a wetland that you hope will attract amphibians, remember it must be deep enough not to freeze to the bottom, as many amphibians will overwinter underwater. Also, occasionally breaking a small hole in the ice (depending on the size of the pond) to allow air exchange with the water's surface, make keep them from running out of oxygen in the winter months.

1.2 Question 2: How can curbs be constructed to be herp friendly?

Although standard city curbs seem low to us, juvenile turtles and toads are so small they are often not able to climb the curb and are trapped on the road. The use of driveway/low slope curbs, such as those often used in cul-de-sacs, allow easy movement for all amphibians and reptiles.

1.3 Question 3: I own a pet store in Wisconsin and want to sell amphibians and reptiles. What are the regulations regarding this?

It is not legal to sell **native** amphibian and reptile species (whether threatened, endangered, special concern, or common) in Wisconsin, regardless of their origin (in-state or out-of-state), unless you have an approved Class A Captive Wild Animal Farm License and are selling tiger salamanders, mudpuppies or northern leopard frogs. Non-native species can be sold according to DNR regulations, but you should check with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) as well as local municipalities and/or county governments to determine if there are any restrictions on selling, transporting or owning "exotic" pets. Finally, you also need to be sure you are not selling species that are internationally red-listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) or federally protected by regulations, including the Lacey Act. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource's Amphibian and Reptile Regulations can be found online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/er/ER0102.pdf>.

1.4 Question 4: Where can I report sightings of rare amphibians and reptiles?

The best way to report species that you observe is online at the following website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/endangeredresources/forms.html>. Remember, it is extremely beneficial to include a picture of the species you've seen with your observation report and it will also be necessary for you to include some level of detailed location information.

1.5 Question 5: What resources are available for identifying Wisconsin amphibians and reptiles?

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Endangered Resources website for amphibians and reptiles: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/Herps.asp> provides identification and additional information on all Wisconsin species.

The following books also provide information on identification of Wisconsin amphibians and reptiles:

Anderson, R. and D. Jansen. Wisconsin frogs. AUDIO FILE. Wisconsin Audubon Society, Madison, Wisconsin. (CD or audio tape)

Christoffel, R. R. Hay and M. Monroe. 2002. Turtles and lizards of Wisconsin (first edition), PUB-ER-104. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, Wisconsin. (book)

Christoffel, R., R. Hay, R. Paloski and L. Ramirez. 2008. Snakes of Wisconsin (second edition), PUB-ER-100. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, Wisconsin. (book)

Christoffel, R., R. Hay, R. Paloski and M. Wolfgram. 2009. Amphibians of Wisconsin (second edition), PUB-ER-105. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, Wisconsin. (book)

Conant, R., and J. T. Collins. 1998. A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York., New York. (book)

Harding, J. H. 1997. Amphibians and Reptiles of the Great Lakes Region. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan. (book)

Kingsbury, B., and J. Gibson. 2002. Habitat management guidelines for amphibians and reptiles of the Midwest. Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. (book)

Korb, R. M. 2001. Wisconsin Frogs: Places to Hear Frogs and Toads Near Our Urban Areas. Northeastern Audubon Society, Inc., Green Bay, Wisconsin. (book and CD)

Sheldon, A.B. 2006. Amphibians and Reptiles of the North Woods. Kollath+Stensaas Publishing, Duluth, Minnesota. (book)

Vogt, R. C. 1981. Natural History of Amphibians and Reptiles of Wisconsin. Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. (book)

Tekiela, S. 2004. Reptiles and Amphibians of Wisconsin Field Guide. Adventure Publications, Cambridge, Minnesota. (book and CD)

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