



## The Woods in Your Backyard

If you were lucky enough to grow up near a patch of woods, you probably remember being so eager to get outside to play that you could barely sit still long enough to finish your breakfast. There were snow forts to build in winter, tree forts to build in summer, and frogs and salamanders to catch in ponds and streams. Whether it was a hundred acres or a vacant lot down the block, the woods were a special place where things changed daily. If you were there often enough, it's likely you saw ferns uncurling in the spring, fallen trees after a windstorm, squirrel tracks in the snow, and the first song birds back from their winter away.

Maybe you missed out on living near the woods as a kid. Don't worry. The woods in your backyard still offer all that and more. They offer the mystery and adventure children love and the privacy and quiet so often lacking from our busy lives.

Depending on your interests and the size of your property, you can create a tranquil woodland flower garden, earn a little income, teach conservation practices to your children, or work with your neighbors to create a community hiking trail. And not only can you have fun doing it, but you don't have to go anywhere. The woods are right out your back door.

### Your Woods are a Good Neighbor

The woods may seem quiet and restful except for the birds singing and the wind rustling through the trees, but they are quietly working away behind the scenes. When they are working well they can:

- ✿ provide homes for a variety of wildlife
- ✿ purify the air we breathe
- ✿ clean the water that filters through them
- ✿ reduce heating costs in winter by buffering wind

- ✿ cool homes in summer by providing shade
- ✿ muffle traffic noise
- ✿ provide a sense of privacy and peace
- ✿ provide some income or tax relief
- ✿ increase property values

### You Decide How Much Time and Money to Spend

There are many reasons for spending some time and effort in your woods, but how much time and money you want to spend is up to you. You may decide all you want to do is walk around and get to know your woods a little better. Or you may decide you have some safety hazards near your house that you need to take care of. There are a lot of possibilities. Here are a few ideas:

- ✿ plant trees and shrubs that attract birds and wildlife
- ✿ create cross country skiing and hiking trails
- ✿ put up bird nesting boxes
- ✿ grow herbs, ginseng, and mushrooms for sale
- ✿ cut firewood while improving homes for birds and wildlife
- ✿ turn trees into furniture or house lumber for your own use
- ✿ grow a woodland wildflower garden or a fern garden
- ✿ plan a nature trail with a local youth group
- ✿ create a scenic picnic spot

### The Homeowner's Guidebook, Resource Lists, and Glossary

This resource guide will help you understand the woods in your backyard and give you some ideas about how to work

with your property, whether you own a 1/10 acre house lot or ten acres on the edge of town.

Each chapter gives an overview of the topic, then points you to a *Resource List* of people, organizations, publications, and Web sites that will give you more detailed information on your particular interests. Addresses, telephone numbers and Internet Web site addresses are provided when known. Any listed publication without ordering information can be borrowed through interlibrary loan from your local library or ordered through a bookstore.

*Family Projects* are included at the end of each chapter. The Family Projects show you how get to know your property as a family and have fun doing it. The activities are most suitable for older children and teens, and all require adult supervision. They can also be adapted by teachers or youth group leaders for instructional use with older students. When completed, the family projects also provide a planning framework for work in your woods.

Unfamiliar terms that you are likely to see again in other forestry publications are in **bold face type** in the text and are defined in the *Glossary* at the back of the guide.

## RESOURCES

The following agencies and organizations often collaborate to provide a wide range of information, services, and training for small landowners. They are good initial contacts for landowners seeking information. They can also direct you to local contacts in your area.

### Maine Forest Service

Provides information and assistance to landowners on sustainable forestry practices, logging, insects and diseases of forest trees, forest fire prevention and control. Call for the number of the Forest Service field forester in your area.

Forest Information Center:  
800-367-0223 (In-state only)  
or 207-287-2791

Forest Fire Information:  
800-750-9777 (General Information)  
888-900-FIRE (Fire Emergency Only)  
Insect and Disease Management: 207-287-2431  
Internet site at <http://www.state.me.us/doc/mfs>

### University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Provides practical, well-researched information on topics ranging from gardening and forestry to family projects and nutrition. Call for a catalog of publications or the number of your local Cooperative Extension Agent.  
General Information Number:  
800-287-0274 (In-state) or 207-581-3188  
Internet site at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>

### Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) / Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)

Provides information and assistance to farmers and non-agricultural landowners (including homeowners on house lots) on how to protect soil, water, and the plants, trees, and animals that rely on them. Call for the number of your local office.  
General Information Number: 207-866-7241  
Internet site at <http://nrcs.usda.gov>

### Small Woodland Owner's Association of Maine (SWOAM)

A non-profit membership organization that encourages sound forest management practices on small properties. Offers informative workshops on a variety of topics including: chainsaw safety techniques, tree identification, managing woodlands for wildlife, and others. Membership not required for attendance. Nine local chapters around the state.  
General Information Number: 207-626-7992