

# Wildlife Hotel: The Art of Building a Functional Brush Pile

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For those of us who don't actively participate in hunting activities, attracting wildlife can still be an important objective on our property. Whether you enjoy watching their antics, wildlife photography, or you just have a tender heart and want to provide a safe habitat, there is a very simple and inexpensive thing you can do to guarantee something will move in. Build a wildlife brush pile.

Whether on a small or large scale, a carefully constructed brush pile will attract a variety of critters to your place. A brush pile can provide supplemental cover from predators like dogs, foxes, coyotes, etc.; a resting or loafing place; and a place to raise young, while allowing safe access to a food source.

The first step is to decide the best location for your brush pile. A functional wildlife brush pile is a little more than just piling up limbs and debris – it takes a little planning. It should be constructed away from traffic zones, along a field edge, adjacent to a food plot, and close to an open natural food source and water. Placing it near a grassy area or field edge will supply a nesting place and food source, along with cover. It should be situated away from the tall edge of the woods to keep predators such as hawks and owls from perching in a nearby tree, waiting on an unsuspecting meal.

A well constructed brush pile will accommodate a variety of wildlife and starts with (as most all building projects) a firm foundation. The basic brush pile has a foundation formed by building a base of larger decay-resistant material that will support the weight of the pile. Large logs, field rocks, cement blocks,

old pipe or tires can be used for this. The base materials should be about 6 inches in diameter and placed about 10 to 12 inches away from each other, wide enough apart to provide easy access within the interior of the pile.

Naturally, the larger the pile of brush, the larger the wildlife you will attract. Depending on your space and available materials, the pile should be 4 to 10 feet tall and 10 to 20 feet in diameter. It

should be made up of small limbs, vines, small brush, pine tops, etc.

On the average, brush piles last three to five years. New material can be added to the top as needed. Depending on the size of your property or site, you can have one or several. Brush piles can be linked together in the interior of a field to provide a safe travel lane for wildlife. Three to four brush piles per acre can be constructed in places where cover is

lacking. For those landowners with smaller space, one brush pile on the back side of the garden plot can be beneficial. It will house lizards, turtles, and toads that will help keep down the insect populations in and around your garden.

Usually winter is the best time to build brush piles because of the availability of building materials from trimming, pruning, and cleanup projects. It is also a great alternative to burning or loading and hauling.

Once you have your brush pile completed, step back, be patient, and wait. Something will find it very soon. Depending on where you live, you can expect such visitors as rabbits, red and grey foxes, raccoons, chipmunks, weasels, quail, lizards, turtles, toads, and a variety of songbirds. Regardless of what kind of brush pile you construct, you are almost guaranteed something will call it home. ♣



should be dense enough in the center to provide adequate shelter, but loose enough around the edges to have easy access. A good rule is that if a person can kick it over or a dog can burrow through it, it is too small.

After the base is established, begin placing larger logs and limbs in a crude crisscross or log cabin fashion. Continue piling on debris, graduating from large to small-diameter material (the opposite of building a campfire). The last layers

## References

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