



BUILDING A BRUSH PILE : HOW AND WHY

After winter storms, a number of downed trees and branches are to be found in local conservation areas. Often these branches are thrown into town trucks to be hauled away for disposal. This is usually an unnecessary expenditure of energy and a waste of landfill space. This memo suggests how such brush can be used as a resource rather than being turned into waste.

What is a brush pile and what good is it?

It is exactly what the name implies : a pile of brush and logs. Building brush piles is a standard technique used by wildlife managers to assist wildlife.

What does a brush pile do for wildlife?

The three essentials for wildlife are food, water, and shelter. A brush pile is valuable primarily as shelter. Small and medium sized mammals such as chipmunks, rabbits, and mice use the brush pile as a home. Songbirds may build nests in it or find food there. Eventually predators such as owls, hawks or foxes are benefited by increased numbers of prey species.

Are there any other benefits?

Yes. The nutrients locked up in the stems and leaves are eventually returned to the soil through decomposition. Also if a brush pile is put over a slope or unnecessary trail where erosion is a problem, the erosion can be stopped.

Where should brush pile be located for maximum benefit to wildlife?

The best place is where there is food and water, but no shelter. A location under trees on the edge of clearings is ideal.

How should the brush pile be constructed?

In The Earth Manual Malcolm Margolin comments as follows: "Architecturally, there is not much to building a brush pile. You simply pile up a lot of brush with the idea of providing shelter for small animals. If you want to get more elaborate, you can put heavy logs or rocks on the bottom to prevent the pile from matting down to the ground, thus keeping it open for the entrances and exits of the animals you attract. You should pile the brush as high as you can - at least four or five feet high - and in general try to keep it twice as wide as it is high. If you have some more heavy logs or limbs, throw them on top to compress the pile and keep it from blowing apart, and voila, you have the perfect brush pile. Members of the American Institute of Architects might blanch when they see it - but they tend to be snobbish anyway. Your wildlife will love it."

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