

# Brush piles: good for wildlife in the backyard or in the countryside

Head and shoulders  
Photo of DC or  
Soil Conservationist  
here

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Whether it's a series of large piles along a forest edge or a smaller single pile near a bird feeder in your back yard or acreage, you can make your land more accommodating for wildlife by building brush piles. Piles of tree limbs, brush, rocks, and other debris, large or small, can offer refuge to birds and other wildlife from the weather and predators.

Once common on most farms, brush pile habitat has been lost in many parts of the countryside as fence lines have disappeared along with the diversified agriculture that's now gone with many farms. Larger fields and "clean farming" methods have led to fewer brush piles.

#### **Helpful to many species.**

Depending on size and location, brush piles are habitat for bob-white quail, rabbits, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, skunks, raccoons, woodchucks, chipmunks, mockingbirds, cardinals, juncos and many other small mammals and birds. They may also attract coyotes, foxes, bobcats, hawks, owls and other predators because of the mammal and bird populations using them.

**Location.** Good locations for brush piles include edges of woodlands, along field borders, and in shelterbelts. Four piles per acre, spaced 150 feet apart, will

give ample wildlife cover.

**Building the pile.** The most important concept in building the pile is to form a solid, rot-resistant base layer with filler above that provides tunnels, dens and openings for animals to hide. Build the base with large hardwood stumps, logs and other large diameter material and then criss cross filler branches on top. Most brush piles are mound or tepee shaped.

An alternative is to "hinge-cut" several trees along timber edges to create a living brush pile.

Partially cut the trees 2 feet off the ground, allowing the trees to fall leaving a portion still connected to the stump. Stack more branches on the tree but leave the treetops uncovered so they can grow for a period of time.

**When to build.** A good time to build a brush pile is in the early spring or late fall, as a part of timber harvest, stand improvement, or firewood cutting.

**Maintenance.** The brush pile will decay, so it's a good idea to add new material each year. For more information, stop at our office at \_\_\_\_\_ (Number) \_\_\_\_\_ (Street) in \_\_\_\_\_ (city), or visit the NRCS website at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov). Or, visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute at [www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov)



*Edges of woodlands and field borders are excellent locations for brush piles. They can offer protection to quail and many other small birds and mammals.*

## Wildlife Ways Did you know....



A group of rabbits is called a herd. Jackrabbits have eyes on the sides of their heads so they can see backward without turning their heads. They can run as fast as 45 miles an hour, and hear sounds from a mile away.