Step by Step Instructions for Changing Your Lawn into a Wildlife Habitat

1. Start planning in the summer. Think of some general goals you want to accomplish, for example, a serene outdoor escape, a formal English garden look, a natural/wild looking meadow, etc. You don’t have to redo your entire lawn. Consider starting with just the front, or perhaps a neglected space between your driveway and a fence.
2. Sketch out your space, with notes on what general types of plants should go where
   1. Note things such as:
      1. The amount of sun spots get
      2. The amount of water a spot usually gets
      3. The height and types of plants that would look good or be functional there (i.e. a sprawling tree, climbing vines, dense shrubs)
3. Go online to [Theodore Payne Organization](http://theodorepayne.org/), [Las Pilitas](http://www.laspilitas.com/), or [Annie’s Annuals](https://www.anniesannuals.com/) to search for the types of natives that might work well there and meet your goals for the space. Keep an open mind; there are many varieties to choose from that will accomplish the same things in your garden. For example, if you want a 15-foot screen, you could select a Dr. Hurd Manzanita, the Ray Hartman Ceanothus, a Wax Myrtle, or a Gowen’s Cynress.
   1. Optional: If you live near a nursery that has California natives, you might want to go and chat with someone about recommendations.
4. Put your plan on paper, make sure you allow space for the plants to grow to their average size. It will look sparse at first, but in just a year or two it will fill out and you will be glad you didn’t cram everything in.
5. Kill any existing lawn
   1. Non-chemical:
      1. Mulching: Cover your lawn with a layer of overlapping cardboard (or 6 layers of newspaper), add about 5 inches of mulch. Water regularly. In about 8-10 weeks, you’ll be ready to plant.
      2. Solarization: Cover your lawn in black plastic sheets that are weighed down with bricks or rocks. Allow 6 weeks for the process to be complete.
   2. Chemical: Spray a commercial product using glyphosate acid, such as Round-Up, on the lawn. Read the product’s instructions for information on how long to wait before planting--usually 1-3 days.
      1. Note: While it sounds scary to put chemicals on your lawn, especially if you have pets or kids, in reality, glyphosate acid is *less harmful* than the homemade salt, soap, and vinegar weed-killer recipe that is floating around online. [Click here to read more about that.](http://weedcontrolfreaks.com/2014/06/salt-vinegar-and-glyphosate/)
6. Once the space is ready or almost ready, buy your plants. You don’t want them hanging out in your garage too long.
7. Place any non-green features where they will go (bird baths, boulders, etc.)
8. At least a day before planting, place your plants in their pots in the planting locations on your plan. Do they still work?
   1. Water those spots thoroughly, and lightly water the potted plants (if necessary) to keep them moist.
9. Planting day:
   1. Dig a hole the same size as the pot. Stick in the whole potted plant into the hole. You should be able to fit the whole plant + pot thing. The soil inside the pot and the soil outside the pot should either line up, or the soil inside should be just slightly higher.
   2. Take the potted plant out of the hole, fill the hole with water.
   3. When the water has totally drained (it might take a while), carefully remove the plastic pot from around the plant. Disturb the root ball as little as possible. *Don’t rake out the roots.*
   4. Put the plant in the hole. Do not add amendments or fertilizers.
   5. Backfill with the native soil.
   6. Create a little trough around the plant using your hands.
   7. Fill the trough with lots of water, refill several times.
10. After you’ve put all the plants into the ground and watered them, mulch the entire section.
    1. Best to worst mulches:
       1. Shredded redwood or cedar
       2. Fir, pine, redwood bark
       3. Arborist chipping of random local trees (some native, some exotics)
       4. Big box store dyed mulch
       5. Manure, lawn clippings, straw or hay
       6. Plastic
    2. By plant type:
       1. Desert plants-use rocks.
       2. Perennials and subshrubs-shredded redwood bark or shredded cedar bark.
       3. Long-lived trees and shrubs- mostly evergreen oak leaf mulch or shredded redwood bark or shredded cedar bark.
11. When the plants are getting established (their first year), they should be checked once a week to see if they need water. Stick your finger in the soil an inch or two down. If it is dry, water; if it is moist, don’t.
    1. Best practice for water (after the first watering): DO NOT USE DRIP IRRIGATION. Use micro-spray emitters or low volume sprinklers instead, so that the plant will be irrigated in a pattern more similar to rainfall. Do not water against (aka blast with a hose) the crown (the main stem of the plant at the soil surface) of the plant. Water should fall in the area of the drip line of the plant and beyond.
    2. If you don’t have an irrigation system, using a hose or bucket, gently water a few inches away from the stem-think slow and steady.
12. The second and succeeding year: water, if needed, during the months of November through April, and try to abstain from watering in the summer (excepting desert plants, which receive summer rain showers, and sprinkling for coastal plants that normally receive fog drip or summer rain showers).
13. In succeeding years: Prune in later summer, never in the spring.