

WOOD PILE

Creating habitats for amphibians and reptiles in your yard



Materials

- Sticks
- Branches
- Logs
- Lumber
- Plywood

Cost
\$0

Tools

- Gloves
- Hoe
- Hand saw
- Some moderate physical labor



Steps

1. Wood piles can be large (6 x 6 feet) or small (3 x 3 feet), but they all start with a base of logs (for large piles) or branches (for small piles) several feet in length. Crisscross the logs allowing for open spaces on the inside of the pile.
2. Next, begin adding smaller logs and branches to the base, again crisscrossing them in a grid-like manner.
3. Continue with smaller branches until a dense, woven structure of wood is produced.
4. The ultimate goal for any wood pile is creating complexity, a mixture of wood and open space for animals to use.

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Location

Since amphibians and reptiles use wood piles for a variety of reasons, it is often best to choose a location for your wood pile that will maximize its suitability for various species. Siting your wood pile where roughly equal parts of the structure receive shade and sunlight works best. You may also choose to build separate wood piles, with one in the sun and one in the shade.

A few important considerations for both wood and brush piles:

- Wood will naturally decay over time, so place it where you can easily add more wood or brush to replenish your pile.
- Piled wood and brush can pose a fire hazard. Do not locate the wood pile near a structure such as a home or outbuilding.
- Animals including rabbits, rodents, and other small mammals will also likely call your wood pile home. A location farther from your own home will keep the animals at a safe viewing distance.
- Wood piles can attract insects like ants and termites (tasty snacks for your amphibians and reptiles!). A dry site away from your home will discourage ants and termites from foraging in your home.
- Most importantly, remember that you are building a home for reptiles and amphibians. Be sure to locate your wood or brush pile away from roads, driveways, or alleyways to minimize interactions with traffic as the animals venture from their home to find food or mates.

Materials and Cost

Wood piles can be built with branches, logs, and even old building materials (plywood, lumber) that you may already have on your property, incurring virtually no cost.

Important: never use wood "treated" with rot-resistant chemicals, like railroad ties or pressure-treated landscape timber. These rot-resistant chemicals can be toxic to amphibians.

The best option is natural wood and brush cleared during pruning or fallen during a storm. When moving dead and downed wood, however, check for signs of use by wildlife – such as active burrows near or beneath the wood – and avoid disturbing any features that appear to be currently used as habitat by creatures.

Beautifying Your Rock Pile

- Dress up" a wood pile with native flowering vines. If choosing this approach, be sure to only use native plants and avoid exotic or invasive species.
- Add rocks around the edge of the wood pile as a nice border.
- Place flat rocks on top of your pile and use as a place to set container plants or garden ornaments.
- Paint some of your wood pieces with non-toxic paint and create some unique patterns.