

# From Great Ideas to Action: Planning is the Key!

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## Introduction

We've covered a lot of ground so far in this book, and hopefully you have gained valuable knowledge about your piece of the Maine woods. Many forestry concepts, project ideas, and educational activities have been discussed and you may feel a little overwhelmed. At this point, you are probably thinking about implementing some projects and working towards the goals you have set. In other words, you are likely ready to put your ideas into action.

The amount of help you need to reach your goals depends, in large part, on their complexity. If your goals are simple, like planting some hard mast trees to attract wildlife, then the resources recommended in this book may be all you need. However, if you've decided to improve the health and vigor of your maple trees and start producing maple syrup, then you may need professional advice and a written plan.

Your first step should be to decide what you want to accomplish. Next, you will need to determine whether your objectives are realistic and affordable. Then you will be ready to decide on the type and amount of assistance you will need to implement your ideas and reach your goals. Landowners with complex goals or an interest in harvesting timber should consider working with a licensed forester.

## Foresters and Loggers

Even if you own a very small piece of land, it's worth knowing the difference between loggers and foresters. This knowledge is even more important if you are interested in harvesting timber.

Loggers are skilled at cutting, processing, and marketing trees and usually pay the landowner a pre-negotiated price as timber is cut and sold to mills. Most of the loggers in Maine are educated and certified by programs that promote safe, efficient, and environmentally sound logging practices. In

addition, many of Maine's loggers are members of professional organizations and frequently attend educational workshops. As you can see, the majority of loggers in Maine are highly trained and very professional.

In Maine, foresters are licensed professionals. Foresters take a long-term view of the forest and help landowners meet their goals. The requirements to obtain and keep a forester license include formal and continuing education, on-the-job training, and adherence to a strict code of ethics.

At the landowner's request, foresters can assess wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and other woodland features. Once a forester collects and analyzes information about your woodland, he or she can prepare a written management plan that acts as a decision-making guide. If you choose to harvest timber, a forester can help you find a logger and help ensure that the harvest meets your objectives.

Foresters charge for services in several common ways. Some have a set rate for each service, others take a percentage of the income from the timber harvests they oversee, and still others charge an hourly fee. It is standard practice to ask foresters for references from previous clients. Talking with a landowner who has worked with a forester over a number of years will give you a good idea whether he or she will manage your property in accordance with your goals and values.



**Logger. Photo: Dan Jacobs**



**Forester. Photo: Dan Jacobs**

## Ask Questions

The Maine Forest Service strongly recommends that landowners work with licensed foresters to plan and oversee timber harvesting. Along with the many non-economic values that woodlands offer, they are also an investment. Standing trees are worth money. Over time and with proper management, they may be worth more. Just like stocks, some trees are worth more than others, and market prices for wood varies. Trees are also more or less valuable depending on the species, size, and quality. Foresters who work on your behalf will tell you when it is in your best interest to cut trees and when it is best to let them grow a while longer.

In addition to timber, there are many other valuable features and resources in your woods. These include: aesthetic beauty, wildlife habitat, clean water, and productive soil. Whereas a well-planned harvest can protect and improve these values these features, they can be impaired and degraded by poor logging practices. Especially when it comes to visual impact, it's important to discuss the outcomes before the job starts. Ask for pictures of completed work, or better yet, visit finished harvests and talk to the landowner about how their harvest went. To see some photos of typical woodlots before and after harvesting, check out the MFS booklet entitled "What Will My Woods Look Like?" (see page iii) or ask your District Forester about it (see back cover).

If you plan to arrange a timber harvest without the help of a licensed forester, there are steps you can take to make sure you and the logger are on the same page to achieve your goals. After all, this is one of the most important decisions you will make concerning your woodlot. As with working with any professional, these steps include asking the potential logger for references and checking those references, asking to see past harvest jobs the logger has done in similar forest conditions, and having a signed contract with the logger. It is important to have a written contract that legally protects you and your property when you are selling timber. Contracts are tools that literally get you, your forester, and your logger on the same page. A helpful sample contract (or agreement) can be found on the Maine Woodland Owners website at <https://www.mainewoodlandowners.org/links-apps>. Also, a brief overview of written contracts can be found in MFS's "Information Sheet 6: Wood Harvests: Worker's Compensation and Landowner Liability" at [https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/publications/information\\_sheets.html](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/publications/information_sheets.html).

## Taking a Walk-Through

Many foresters are willing to visit your property and provide general management suggestions. This service will likely come at a cost, but foresters may roll the expense into the price of a forestry plan or some other future charge for their services. In addition, the MFS offers free advice to landowners, and District Foresters can even visit your woods for a short walk-through.

It is a good idea to prepare a list of your objectives and the woodland features you value prior to meeting with a forester. A professional should work with you, keep your interests in mind, and tell you if your objectives are practical. In addition, the forester you choose to work with should be willing to answer your questions and help you learn about your property.

### **MFS District Forester Program**

The MFS District Forester Program is a great resource for landowners just getting to know and understand the woods they own. District Foresters are located throughout the state and can provide landowners with free advice and information on tree identification, tree health, forestry planning, wood markets, and upcoming workshops and events. In many cases, District Foresters are available to walk through your woods and discuss your goals in person. A map that provides the locations and contact information for each District Forester is provided on the back cover of this publication.

## What is Good Forestry?

Good forestry utilizes science-based management practices to promote the health of the forest and meet landowner goals. It means taking into consideration the sustainability of both woodland “crops” and the ecological health of the forest. In many cases, foresters utilize management strategies that mimic natural processes to achieve desired results. For example, logging may be carried out in a way that is similar to a natural disturbance such as a windstorm. As an owner of a small piece of the Maine woods, good forestry should mean using accepted forestry practices to reach your goals and improve your woodland for future generations.

# You and Your Woods: Two Examples

If you've read some of the earlier chapters of this book, you're aware that a wide variety of subjects have been discussed. This section will bring together many of those subjects and put them into context using two examples. The following two examples illustrate how small property owners worked toward meeting their woodland goals.

## Woodland Example 1

This nine-acre property is fairly flat with a mixture of aspen, cherry, white birch, gray birch, and balsam fir. Most of the property is old pastureland and much of the aspen has broken branches from winter storms. A dense thicket of shade-tolerant spruce and fir are growing beneath the sun-loving hardwoods, and many have umbrella-shaped tops from growing in the understory for a long period of time.

Old stonewalls that used to border field edges run through the woods. An old white pine with a dead top grows next to one of the walls in the middle of the woods. A small patch of hemlock is located in the back corner of the property. This patch is the edge of a larger hemlock stand that extends onto the neighboring property.

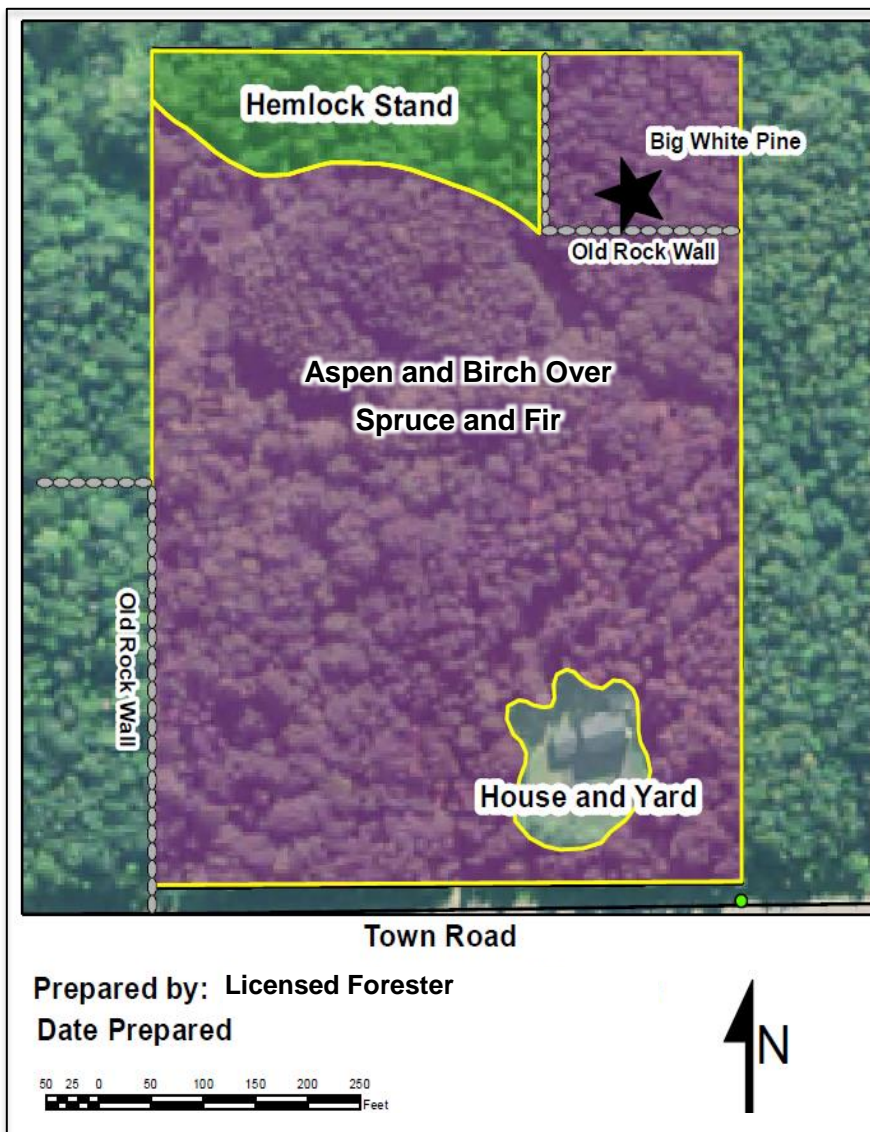
### Landowner Objectives

The owners want to walk through the woods, which currently isn't easy, because of the dense conifer thickets. They also want to improve wildlife habitat and the overall health of the forest. They don't like how the damaged aspens look and want to do something about them. They've also noticed shelf mushrooms, or conks, growing on the birch but aren't sure how this affects tree health.



**Aspen over fir. Photo: Dan Jacobs**

Example 1: Map of the property before the project is completed



Source: Greg Miller

## Actions

The landowners decide to pay a forester to walk through their woods for a couple of hours and answer some questions. In addition, the forester will prepare a map of the property that can be updated as projects are completed and work is done. Keeping their priorities in mind, the forester tells them that the aspen is overly mature and diseased with canker. The broken branches no longer produce buds, which are a favorite food for partridge (ruffed grouse) in the late winter and early spring. Further, broken and hanging branches are safety risks and could fall at any time.

Shelf mushrooms growing on some of the birch indicate internal decay. Several could serve as snag trees for wildlife and the others cut to reduce safety hazards. The forester recommends leaving the cut birch on the forest floor for wildlife use and to replenish the soil.



**Two different species of shelf mushrooms on a birch tree. Photo: Aaron Bergdahl**

The big old pine with the dead top already has woodpecker holes on one side but will stand for a long time without being a hazard. However, it is important to reassess its condition every few years. The forester tells the landowners that cutting much of the aspen and some of the birch would be the best fit for their priorities of improving access and wildlife habitat.

Thinning out some of the conifers in the understory will provide the remaining trees more room to grow, thus diversifying the characteristics of the woods. They could also leave some of the understory untouched to provide dense cover for wildlife.



**Hairy woodpecker. Photo: Pam Wells**

Harvesting the aspen is a small job and it will be difficult (but not impossible) to find a logger willing to do it. The forester estimates that the amount of timber removed will be approximately 3 truckloads or about 20 cords. The landowners will probably make little money on this harvest, but

the intent is to improve the forest. To find a logger, the landowners ask their forester for recommendations. The forester supplies a list of trained loggers in the area. It takes some searching, but they finally find an independent logger that has time for a small job.

The landowners, and the forester on their behalf, negotiate a contract with the logger. It is important to understand that contracts help get everyone on the same page and protect all the parties involved in the harvest. The forester also reminds the landowners that they must file a Forest Operations Notification with the Maine Forest Service if they plan to sell any wood.

Working with the forester, the landowners flag a loop trail for the woodcutter to haul the logs out. Seeding the trails with native grasses and clover, following the harvest, will help protect soil and water and also provide food for wildlife. With a little exploration, the forester finds that the hemlock patch at the back of the property appears to be an important piece of a larger deer wintering area. The owners and the forester agree that leaving it alone is best.

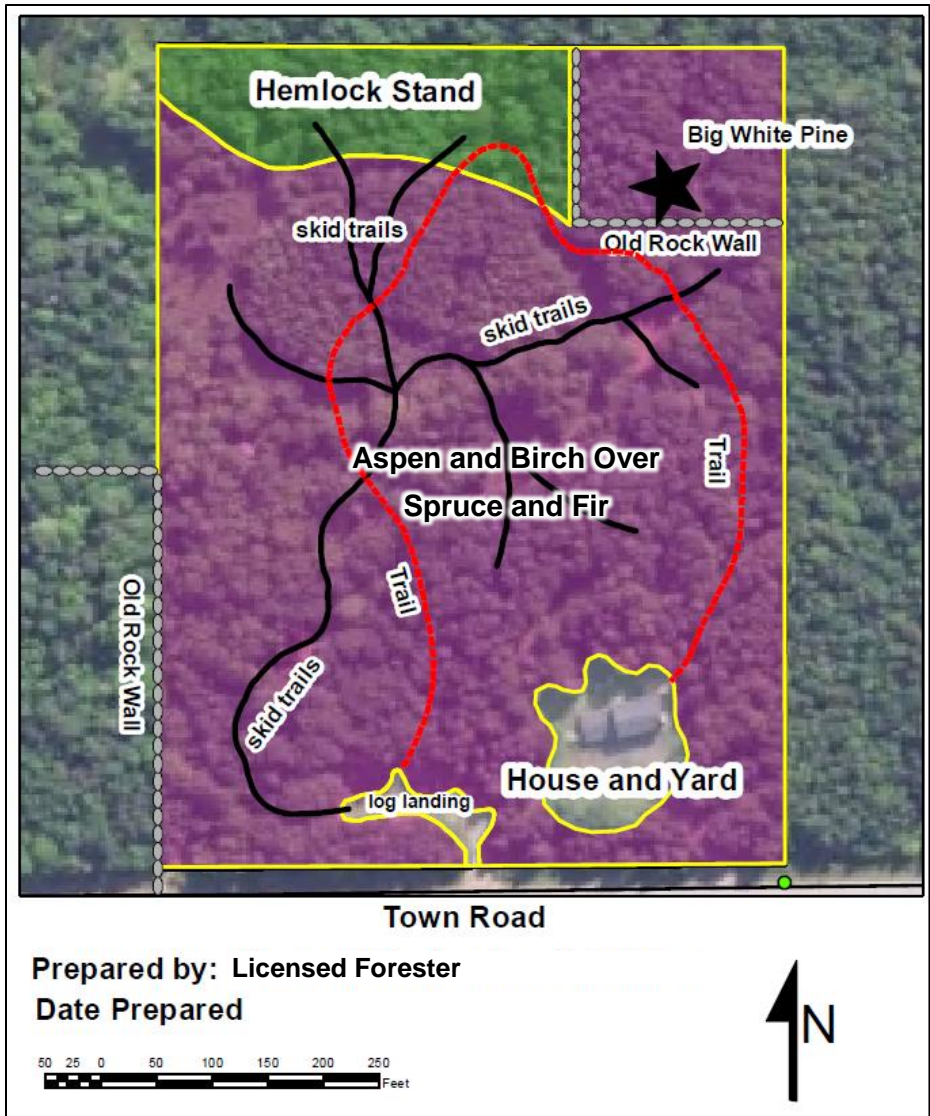
In the end, these landowners achieved their goals with the help of a licensed forester—and with a bit of research and hard work.



**Hemlock stand. Photo: MFS**



Example 1: Map of the property after the project is completed



Source: Greg Miller

## Woodland Example 2

This property has a house on 1.5 acres of mixed northern hardwoods. The woods are primarily composed of oak, birch, and maple of varying heights. Some ornamental conifers grow near the house and a large, old white pine grows near the edge of the lawn.

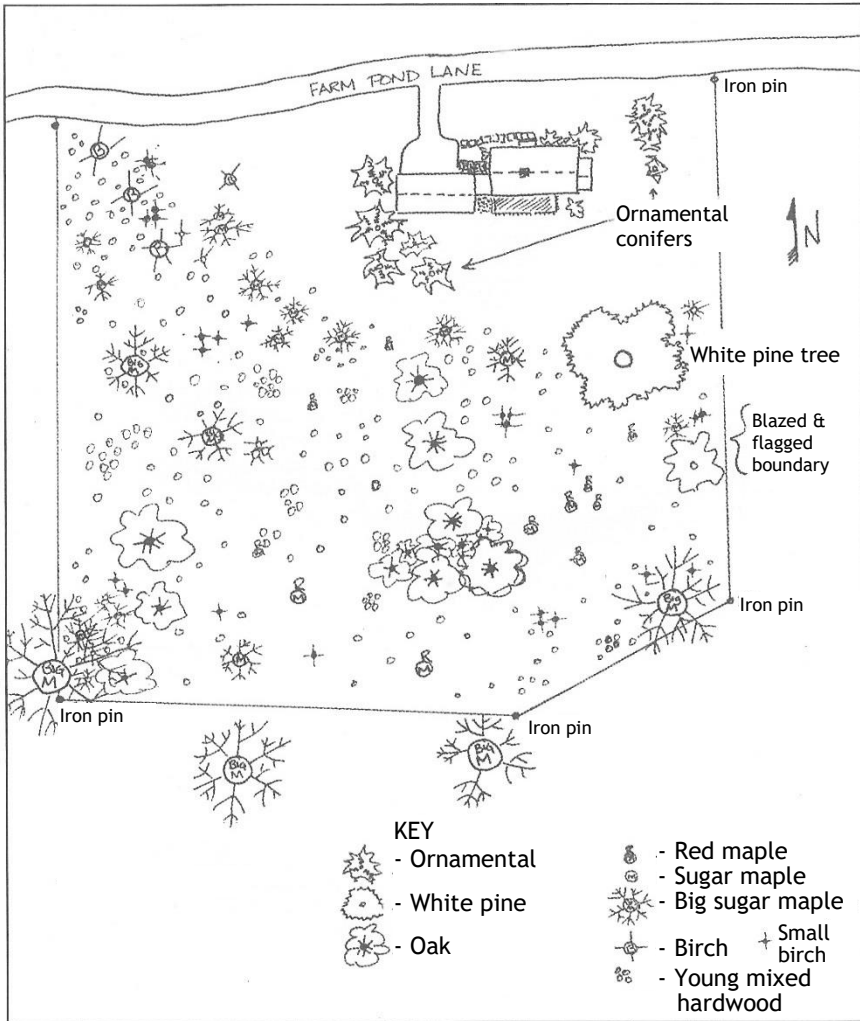
### Landowner Objectives

The owners, a young couple with two children, like to watch birds and would like to make maple syrup for their own use and to give as gifts. They would also like to emphasize the beauty of the birch and maple trees. Their primary consideration is to make sure their actions improve the overall health of their property.



Mixed northern hardwoods. Photo: Dan Jacobs

**Example 2: Map of the property before the project is completed**



Source: Terri Lee Mills

**Actions**

The owners clearly mark their property boundaries and, using the *Forest Trees of Maine* (see page ii), identify many of the trees in their woods. They find that many of the trees they thought were sugar maples are actually red maples. The red maples will produce sap, though it won't be as sweet as that from sugar maples. To find out if the maples are large enough to tap, they measure the circumference of two dozen trees at shoulder height. A few of the trees have trunks over 31 inches in circumference (10 inches diameter)

and meet the minimum recommended size for tapping. They mark each tree they plan to tap with colored flagging to make them easier to find.

On a hand-drawn map of their property, they record notes about the size and health of the trees. Some maples growing close to other trees have small crowns. These won't be good sap producers unless they have room to spread out in the canopy and grow more leaves. The landowners decide to help the largest maples with the biggest crowns by cutting down competing trees. They also decide to take a chainsaw safety class and do the work themselves.

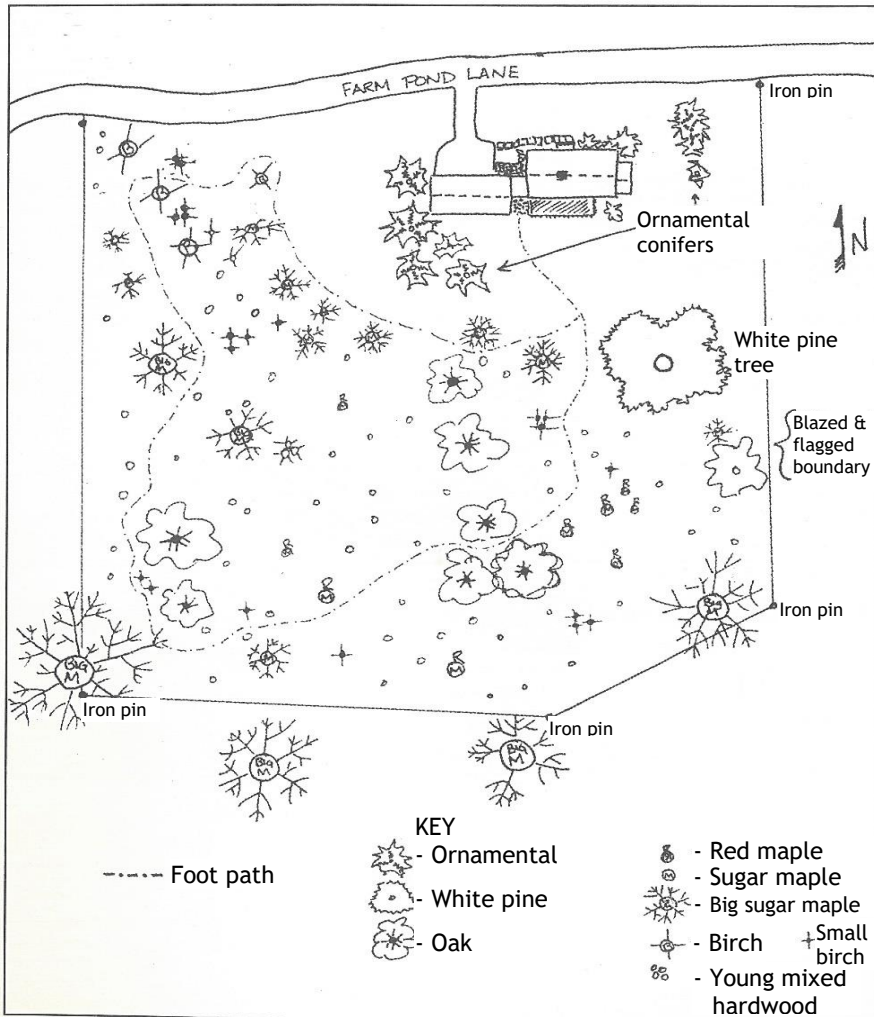
When they first scouted their woods, the owners noticed several large sugar maples on the neighboring property. They decide to contact the neighbors to tell them about their maple sugaring plans and ask if they are willing to have their trees tapped in exchange for some maple syrup. After discussing how maple syrup is made, the neighbors readily agree and ask if they could join in during the maple sugaring season.

The big white pine at the back of the lawn has a huge dead branch. The owners think it might be diseased and contact the MFS Forest Health and Monitoring Division (see Primary Resources, page 3). From the information they obtain, they believe that the branch was damaged in a storm and they hire a licensed arborist to remove it.

The owners consider pruning the lower branches of many trees over the entire lot to create a more park-like look. After finding out that this kind of pruning discourages some wildlife, they decide to prune only one small area growing red oak. They also plan to put in a loop trail to take advantage of birdwatching opportunities.

In short, the goals of these owners were achievable with a moderate amount of guidance from natural resource professionals. Please note how they made good decisions in terms of safety by hiring an arborist to remove a hazard and by completing a chainsaw safety class. This example illustrates how motivated landowners can work to complete projects and achieve their goals.

**Example 2: Map of the property after the project is completed**



**Source: Terri Lee Mills**

**Do You Know?**

#6. The year of the last log drive down the Kennebec River?

**Answer on page 120**

# Backyard Family Activity #8: Creating a Plan for Work and Fun



Hopefully, you have found a great deal of useful information in this book. The eight Backyard Family Activities and numerous additional ideas for woodlot projects may seem overwhelming. At this point, you may be asking yourself which projects and ideas to take action on—and in what order. In this Backyard Family Activity, you will get organized and create a workplan that will keep you motivated to improve, enjoy, and understand the woods in your backyard.

## Items Needed

- Pencils, colored markers or pens, notepaper
- Folders or a binder
- A wall calendar
- Copies of notes and maps from previously completed Backyard Family Activities

## Getting Ready

1. With your family, brainstorm a list of projects you would like to complete on your property. You can use the Backyard Family Activities and the ideas in this book, or you can think up your own projects. Some of the suggestions in this book include creating a wildlife blind, making maple syrup, and establishing a rain garden.

The following list of Backyard Family Activities may be helpful in your brainstorming session:

- #1. “Scouting Your Land.” A basic map of your property will be useful no matter what you decide to do, and you can improve it as you discover more about your land (page 24).
- #2. “Making Maple Taffy.” A great introduction to value-added maple products (page 47).
- #3. “Plant a Hard Mast Species.” Hard mast species of trees and shrubs can greatly improve wildlife habitat (page 49).
- #4. “Using a Compass.” Navigating around your woods can be fun (page 64).
- #5. “The Three-Legged Compass Walk.” Navigating with a compass is an important skill for people enjoying the Maine woods (page 66).

#6. “Getting Down and Dirty.” Learning about your soil will help you understand the limitations on what you can accomplish with your property (page 85).

#7. “Assessing Timber Potential.” Your property may be able to generate timber income now or in the future (page 101).

#8. “Creating a Plan for Work and Fun.” A work plan will help you reach your goals (page 117).

2. When you finish your list, discuss all the items and identify your top priorities. Which projects do you want to focus on first?
3. It is also important to discuss how much time you are willing to spend on each project. Some projects, like making maple syrup, are very involved and time-consuming. In contrast, some projects listed in this book can be completed in a few hours or less. Consider starting with an easy to complete project and move on to more challenging projects in the future.
4. The woods in your backyard should be fun, so don’t make your family projects a chore. Staying flexible on deadlines will keep them from becoming tedious. However, some planning is necessary, and this activity will help you stay on track.

## The Activity

The purpose of this activity is to create a work plan for the woods in your backyard that includes a schedule for the completion of multiple projects.

## Timeframe

Two hours at most to create a plan.

## Steps

1. Make a list of the projects you want to complete. They can be based on the Backyard Family Activities, other project suggestions in this book, or your own ideas. After you make a comprehensive list, decide which three projects you want to complete first.
2. If you still aren’t sure which projects are the most important to you, it might be a good idea to start with the basics. You will get a good overview of your woodlot and learn some forestry fundamentals by completing Backyard Family Activities #1, #4, and #6. If you have already completed these, start working on more difficult projects.

3. Once you have prioritized your “short list” of projects, write down the steps necessary to complete each one. This will be easy if you are using the Backyard Family Activities in this book—because the steps are spelled out. However, there is always room to expand upon the information already provided. At this point, you may want to arrange your notes and project information in a binder or set of folders.
4. Create a list of the materials you will need and the approximate cost of each. Some projects can be completed with little or no cost, but some may require a financial investment. For instance, building a rain garden is not very difficult, but you will need to purchase some plants from a local garden center. This is a good time to evaluate project cost and your budget.
5. Use a monthly wall calendar to list when specific work needs to take place. For example, you could thin maple stands in the fall when the foliage is beautiful and the mosquitoes are gone. Use a different colored pen for each of your projects, and you’ll see at a glance what work/action is related to which project. You may decide to keep your calendar with your “project binder” or you may want to hang it on a wall—so it is always visible.
6. Fill your project binder or folders with all the paperwork from your projects and stay organized. Good recordkeeping is important when you are completing projects on your property.
7. You may also use your project calendar to record where and when you see certain plants and animals. For instance, you might mark the date that you first notice red maples flowering or the date you saw a deer eating from an apple tree. Just remember to make staying organized fun.

You will be able to complete a lot of work and have a lot of fun by staying organized and following your work plan. Don’t forget to enjoy the projects you work on in your woods. As mentioned earlier, it is wise to start with an “easy to complete” project and work towards those that are more challenging.