

# HOW TO BUILD A TURTLE NESTING SITE



Sometimes turtles nest in problem areas like gardens, driveways or compost piles. To encourage turtles to nest elsewhere, or to create nesting habitat if it is lacking, consider building a nesting site. Keep in mind that turtles will often return to sites where they have nested before, so it may take a few seasons before a new site is used. We also recommend having nest protectors ready to protect any nests laid.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

### Materials

- At least 4 metres<sup>3</sup> of substrate (ideally a mixture of fine gravel, sand and existing soil)
- Shovel
- Landscaping fabric
- Wheelbarrow (optional)

### Location

One of the most important factors that determines the success of a nesting site is its location. Good locations have the following properties:

- Close to a wetland, marsh, lake, etc.
- Above the high-water line
- Visible from the water
- Within 50 metres of the shoreline
- Located in the open to receive sun most of the day

If there is a known nesting location that you are trying to discourage turtles from using, create the new nesting site between it and the water. This way, female turtles are more likely to encounter the new site as they travel.



Snapping Turtle hatchling. | CWF



Blanding's Turtle laying her eggs in a sandy area. CWF REFLECTIONS OF NATURE PHOTO CONTEST | Wesley Pitts



Blanding's Turtle hatchlings. | CWF

For additional information on turtles: [HelpTheTurtles.ca](https://www.helptheturtles.ca) | [info@cwf-fcf.org](mailto:info@cwf-fcf.org)



Building a turtle nesting site | J. Paterson

## Construction

Turtles will nest in a variety of soils, but we recommend a mixture of fine gravel and sand. Avoid soils with high levels of clay or silt. Some organic matter is fine but more organic matter will encourage plant growth.

The exact size of your nesting site can be flexible, so long as the following guidelines are followed.

- At least three metres in diameter
- Depth of at least 50 centimetres
- Main side facing south or southwest
- Slope of this face is no more than 30 degrees

Mix the sand and gravel thoroughly. A wheelbarrow may be handy to move the sand and gravel mixture to the site.

Place landscaping fabric on the ground where the nest site will be created. The fabric will help prevent the growth of plants.

Arrange the sand and gravel mixture so that it forms a mound at least 50 cm high in the centre and has a slight slope towards the south or southwest.

## Maintenance

Over time, the mound may become overgrown with plants which can discourage turtles from nesting there. A large amount of plant growth can cool nests from the shade, or the roots can damage the eggs. Some simple maintenance will keep the site in good condition for nesting turtles:

- To avoid soil compaction, rake the surface of the mound in spring (late April or early May) after any over-wintering hatchlings have left the nest.
- Remove plants and roots growing in the mound in early spring. A small amount of plant growth is fine.
- Avoid nest mound maintenance in the fall as there may be eggs still there, or hatchlings overwintering in the nest.

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