

Turtle Garden Project

What are Turtle Gardens?

- Turtle Gardens are patches of sandy soil above the high water line that provide nesting habitat for diamondback terrapins and other nesters

Why are Turtle Gardens important?

- Nesting habitat is being lost due to shoreline development, erosion and flooding.
- Turtle Gardens can provide nesting habitat for terrapins that would otherwise cross roadways and put themselves in danger to find suitable habitat to nest.
- Turtle Gardens give terrapins a place to nest without risking their safety.

How are Turtle Gardens made?

- A suitable area for a Turtle Garden is chosen based on terrapin access areas used by terrapins to seek nesting areas.
- A Turtle Garden is made of a mixture of sands and soils of different particle sizes to best imitate natural conditions of a terrapin nesting habitat.
- The sand is spread around the area above the high water line with at least two feet (60 cm) of elevation to give terrapins plenty of space to dig down without being below the high water line.

Example of the Turtle Garden Process

Turtle Garden at the Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts and Sciences (LBIF), Loveladies, N.J., 2015.

Before



After



The Problem

Terrapins at the LBIF were nesting in the parking lot where they were sometimes hit by cars.

The Process



- We first survey the location to decide on the best place to put the Turtle Garden.
- In this case, we decided the best place was next to the path the terrapins used to access nesting areas across the parking lot and/or roadway.



- The area chosen is then cleared of most vegetation, but we leave enough to provide some shade to the Turtle Garden and shelter for emerging hatchlings.
- Once the area is cleared, the sand mixture used for the Turtle Gardens is delivered and ready to distribute.



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- The sand is then spread throughout the selected area evenly creating a two foot (60 cm) elevation in the center of the Garden.
- All sides of the Turtle Garden are given a gentle slope to provide the nesting terrapins easy access to the site.



- At this particular Turtle Garden, a small fence was installed just prior to hatchlings emerging to keep the terrapin hatchlings from wandering into the parking lot after emergence. Hatchlings did have access to the path.
- This Garden used cages to protect nests from predators while still allowing hatchlings to escape. This provided us an opportunity to determine hatch success.

The Results



The first year was a success with most of the eggs hatching from five nests in the Turtle Garden!

- All of the eggs hatched in two of the five nests (8 and 10 eggs).
- Two nests hatched all but one of their eggs (10 of 11 eggs and 3 of 4 eggs).
- Only one nest had less than 50% hatching (3 of 8 eggs).



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