

Attracting Birds Naturally



The Vermont and New York Master Gardener Programs, supported by the University of Vermont and Cornell Extension and Lake Champlain Sea Grant, support the objectives of the Lake Champlain Management Plan and Basin Program. This factsheet is intended to help prevent or reduce pollution coming from residences within the Lake Champlain Basin.



Good for the birds: Good for you

Attracting birds to your backyard is usually considered just an enjoyable pastime. But did you know that there are other benefits? Birds reduce populations of insects that attack flowers, lawns, gardens, and people. The idea of attracting birds usually brings to mind images of bird feeders, birdhouses, and birdbaths. But there is another more natural way of attracting birds: landscaping with plants that are desirable to birds. Birds are attracted to plants that provide food and cover, a nesting place, or a refuge from predators. As natural habitats are destroyed and bird populations decline, it becomes increasingly important for individual citizens to create miniature bird sanctuaries in their backyards. A garden haven for birds includes water, food shelter, and safety from predators.

Variety is the spice of life

Birds normally feed on brightly colored berries, seeds of all sorts (including the seeds of pine cones and other conifers), insects, and—in some cases—nectar. Birds enjoy variety, so keep this in mind when landscaping. Use a full range of plant material including flowers, grasses, vines, trees, and shrubs—both deciduous and evergreen. Vary the sizes, shapes, and species of your selections. You will likely find yourself enjoying the variety as much as the birds do.

Choosing the right vegetation

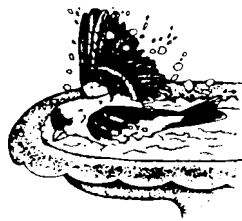
Almost any plant will provide some benefit to birds, whether it be seeds or berries, thick underbrush for protection, soft material for nesting (orioles often weave milkweed fluff into their nests), or bright flowers which attract insects. To provide the most beneficial plants, refer to the “Plants for Attracting Birds” table.



Besides choosing appropriate plants, there are some general guidelines to follow:

- Plant shrubs and hedges densely in or under to provide adequate cover (a tangled thicket is heaven to a bird family).
- Avoid over-pruning, as this will decrease the number of buds, seeds, and berries available to birds.
- If you have a dead tree, consider keeping it if it is not endangering property or health, because it provides excellent nesting sites.
- Avoid using insecticides, because they can be fatal to birds.

Another aspect of gardening for birds that is important is to provide a source of water. Because most gardens do not come with a pond or running stream, reasonable substitutions can be easily made. The simple (and familiar) pedestal birdbath actually does an admirable job. But be sure it is not filled too deep (1 or 2 inches will do), because birds prefer not to venture much beyond ankle depth. It is also important also to realize that songbirds are particularly attracted to the sound of water; a mere trickling or even dripping is quite adequate.



One other factor to consider is that many birds are uncomfortable in large open lawn spaces. So if you've been considering shrinking your lawn in order to decrease your mowing time and effort, you could easily rationalize that you're doing it for the birds!

Plants for attracting birds

Trees

<i>Acer rubrum</i>	red maple
<i>Carya spp.</i>	hickories
<i>Celtis spp.</i>	hackberries
<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>	Russian olive
<i>Fagus grandiflora</i>	American beech
<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	white ash
<i>Juniperus scopulorum</i>	Rocky Mountain juniper
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	eastern red cedar
<i>Malus spp.</i>	crab apples, apples
<i>Morus alba</i>	white mulberry
<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	ironwood or eastern hop hornbeam
<i>Pinus strobus</i>	eastern white pine
<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	quaking aspen
<i>Prunus serotina</i>	wild black cherry
<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	chokecherry
<i>Quercus alba</i>	white oak
<i>Quercus palustris</i>	pin oak
<i>Quercus rubra</i>	red oak
<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	Canadian or eastern hemlock

Shrubs

<i>Amelanchier spp.</i>	serviceberries, shadblow, shadbush
<i>Cornus sericea</i>	red-osier dogwood
<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	common winterberry
<i>Myrica spp.</i>	bayberries
<i>Rhododendron catawbiense</i>	catawba rhododendron
<i>Rubus spp.</i>	blackberries, raspberries
<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	American elderberry
<i>Vaccinium spp.</i>	blueberries
<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	arrowwood viburnum
<i>Viburnum trilobum</i>	highbush cranberry

Flowers

<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	common snapdragon
<i>Campis radicans</i>	trumpet vine
<i>Fuchsia x hybrida</i>	common fuschia
<i>Hemerocallis spp.</i>	daylily
<i>Lilium spp.</i>	lilies
<i>Monarda didyma</i>	bee balm, bergamot, Oswego Tea
<i>Phlox paniculata</i>	garden phlox, summer phlox
<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	nasturtium

Master Gardener Program

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