

Bird Gardens

What is a Bird Garden?

Bird watching and gardening are two of the most popular hobbies in America. Landscaping to attract birds brings the two activities together. A thriving bird garden – which is an area planted with trees, shrubs, vines and flowers selected to attract a variety of birds – will be filled with melodious sounds, graceful movements and lively color throughout the year.

Once birds start visiting your garden, they are likely to continue throughout the season and return the following year. There's nothing quite like the vibrant call of a Chickadee in early spring or the spectacle of a hummingbird feeding on a trumpet vine in full bloom. Whether you're a novice birder or an avian expert, a bird garden will provide hours of entertainment and enjoyment – not to mention environmental benefits all year long.

How does it help the environment?

Growing a bird garden is about enjoying the beauty, splendor and diversity of the birds in your region. It stands as a testament to the benefits of conservation in a world where hundreds of species are in serious peril. Benefits include:

- Increased bird populations - suitable natural bird habitats continue to be lost to developments.
- Insect control – birds control insect populations without the use of expensive and hazardous pesticides and chemicals.
- Education – creating a bird garden can inspire young people to develop a lifelong interest in wildlife and conservation.

Create Your Own Bird Garden

The secret to attracting birds to your yard is to provide food, water and shelter.

Food

Plants that produce natural food sources – seeds, berries, fruits, nuts and nectar – will draw the greatest number of species to your yard. They are important sources of fat, energy and nutrients, which are essential for the rigors of breeding, chick rearing and migration.

Insects are another food source for birds and their presence indicates a healthy, well-balanced environment. Many insects, such as lacewings lady beetles, are quite beneficial in the garden because they eat aphids and other harmful insects. And many species of birds, such as warblers and wrens, dine almost exclusively on insects.

Shelter

Trees, shrubs and vines provide shelter from wind, snow and ice. They also offer excellent spots for perching, courtship displays and nesting.

More than likely, your yard has at least one large tree which already attracts some birds. This is a great place to start, and you can plant a variety of smaller trees, shrubs, vines and groundcovers nearby to attract additional bird species.

Some birds prefer cavities and adapt well to nesting boxes, while other prefer nesting on the ground or in the branches of trees at various heights. Birds also use plant materials in building their nests, so planting a variety of vine and trees can help entice more birds to your property.

Water

A good water source will draw birds like a magnet and can double the number of birds that visit your yard. A bird bath will provide sufficient water for drinking, bathing and cooling in the heat of summer.

Tips for Planting and Growing

Remember that a garden is never complete! It's a work in progress that will evolve over time. When first planted, the garden may seem sparse, since it can take several seasons for perennials to multiply and flourish. To fill in bare patches during the first year, you can plant a variety of colorful annuals.

Plants native to our region are the ideal choice for home gardens. Typically, native plants require less water and fertilizer than non-native species, and many are naturally resistant to pests. When selected to match site conditions, native plants create small ecosystems that attract birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. By locating plants appropriately, you can make better use of wet, dry, sunny and shady areas in your garden and reduce the costs of watering.

Suggested Plants:

Trees

Flowering dogwood
Serviceberry
Easter red cedar
Easter hemlock
White pine

Shrubs and Vines

Wild grape
Virginia creeper
Northern bayberry
Sumac
Viburnum
Black chokeberry
Grey dogwood
Winterberry
Trumpet vine

Perennial and Annuals

Aster
Purple coneflower
Black-eyes Susan
Goldenrod
Bee balm
Columbine
Sunflower