

Plants for the Birds

Birdscaping Your Yard



Watching backyard birds can be a relaxing, an entertaining and an educational activity. Seeing a bright red cardinal in the dead of winter can be uplifting. A visit by a ruby-throated hummingbird outside the breakfast nook can be a great way to start the day. A sighting of an unexpected bird guest can send you scurrying for binoculars and books. Finding out that you've seen an indigo bunting is cause for celebration. Birdwatching is fun!

Birdscaping, or landscaping for the birds, can make birdwatching even more enjoyable. To get the most pleasure out of your birdwatching activities, consider developing a habitat that is the most conducive to attracting as well as viewing birdlife. Four basic requirements are needed to provide good bird habitat in your yard. **Food, cover, nesting and water are all essential for birds, and plants can supply all these necessities.**

Evergreens can furnish cover. They afford a place for birds in bad weather. Dense thorny plants, such as hawthorns and shrub roses, provide a safe haven from predators.

In addition to cover, nesting sites and materials are necessary to accommodate birds. Many of the same plants that provide cover also make excellent nesting sites. Dense shrubs or trees like blackhaw viburnum and hawthorns are great choices. Birds use many different materials for constructing their nests. Some of the favorites include: the peeling bark strips from ninebark, the fluffy seed heads of common milkweed and the downy seed heads of ornamental grasses. Having these plants in your yard increase your likelihood of having nestfuls of baby birds outside your window.

Bathing and clean drinking water are prime considerations when designing your garden. A bird bath or a small

pond provides an excellent location for feather cleaning. Birds will drink water throughout the year if a heater is used during cold weather. Some plants such as cupplant capture rainwater in their cup shaped leaves which is later utilized by birds. Running or dripping water is particularly attractive to birds, especially warblers. Designing small waterfalls or fountains into your yard is bird friendly!

Feeding birds is crucial for attracting them.

Strategically placed feeders, close to cover, yet with open access for landing are effective. While feeders provide food for many seed-eaters, insect and fruit eating birds should not be ignored. Robins, catbirds and cedar waxwings relish small fruits such as crabapples, elderberries, dogwoods and serviceberries. Plants provide habitat for many insect species and these insects are in turn food sources for several unusual bird species such as: scarlet tanager, bluebirds and Baltimore orioles. Nuts and seeds of plants are also a major component of some bird's diets. Blue jays are fun to watch as they crack acorns, while pine siskins prefer the seeds of white spruce and pines.

The design of the birdscape is very important. The garden should be planted in tiers or levels. The upper tree canopy is used for roosting and nest building by birds like hawks, orioles and tanagers. The mid-level, consisting of shrubs and small trees, is occupied by birds such as catbirds, woodpeckers and nuthatches. This area affords more protection than the upper level. Robins, juncos and doves are primarily seen feeding on the ground level of perennials and turf. All three levels should be considered when planting your yard as well as the view from inside the home.

Inside is a detailed list of plants that are useful in providing cover, nesting and food for birds.

Food for the Birds

Trees	Food Attraction	Food Value	Birds Known to Eat Food
Maples (<i>Acer</i>)	Seeds (Insects)	Fair	Baltimore oriole, wrens, warblers
Serviceberries (<i>Amelanchier</i>)	Dark purple fruit in early July	Excellent	Baltimore oriole, bluebird, cedar waxwing, Scarlet tanager, junco, Northern flicker, cardinal, robin, catbird
Yellow Birch (<i>Betula alleghaniensis</i>)	Small seeds, buds	Good	12 species - goldfinch, junco, pine siskin, chickadee
River Birch (<i>Betula nigra</i>)	Small seeds, buds	Good	Pine siskin, redpoles, fox and tree sparrows
Paper Birch (<i>Betula pap.</i>)	Small seeds, buds	Good	24 species
Musclewood (<i>Carpinus car.</i>)	Cluster of winged nutlets	Fair	Preferred food of ruffed grouse, blue jay
Hackberry (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>)	Small purplish berry late fall and early winter	Excellent	24 species - Northern flicker, cardinal, Northern mockingbird
Pagoda Dogwood (<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>)	Blue fruit in September	Excellent	Favored by crested flycatcher, cardinal, robin and bluebird
Washington Hawthorn (<i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i>)	Orange-red fruit from autumn into mid-winter	Good	39 species - catbird, kingbird, purple finch, cedar waxwing, robin
Winter King Hawthorn (<i>Crataegus vir. 'Winter King'</i>)	Orange fruit from autumn into late winter	Good	39 species - catbird, kingbird, purple finch, cedar waxwing, robin
White Ash (<i>Fraxinus americana</i>)	Seeds	Good	Preferred food of evening grosbeak, purple finch
Magnolias (<i>Magnolia</i>)	Fleshy orange fruit	Good	19 species
Ornamental Crabapples (<i>Malus - especially 'Birdland' and 'Ormiston Roy'</i>)	Small red, orange, yellow fruits	Excellent	44 species - cedar waxwing, downy woodpecker, purple finch, pheasant, robin, grosbeaks
Ironwood (<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>)	Cluster of winged nutlets	Good	Preferred by ruffed grouse, blue jay
Quaking Aspen (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>)	Catkins, buds	Good	Preferred food by ruffed grouse. Also evening grosbeak and purple finch. 8 other species.
Amur Chokecherry (<i>Prunus maackia</i>)	Small black cherries in August - September	Excellent	84 species
Black Cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	Small purplish black cherries August -September	Excellent	84 species
Oaks (<i>Quercus</i>)	Acorns (Insects)	Good to excellent	Turkey, blue jay, wood duck, tanager
Mountainash (<i>Sorbus</i>)	Red to orange red berries in October and early winter	Excellent	14 species - cedar waxwing, robin, catbird, scarlet tanager. Attractive to many migrating birds

Evergreens	Food Attraction	Food Value	Birds Known to Eat Food
Junipers (<i>Juniperus</i>)	Bluish berry-like fruit	Excellent	54 species - cedar waxwing, blue jay, cardinal, catbird, chickadee, Northern flicker, evening and pine grosbeaks
Spruce (<i>Picea</i>)	Cone with winged nutlets in scales	Good	9 species - junco, evening and pine grosbeaks, purple finch, red breasted nuthatch
Pines (<i>Pinus</i>)	Cone with nuts in scales	Fair	Up to 48 species feed on nuts
Arborvitae (<i>Thuja occ.</i>)	Seeds in small cones	Fair	Pine siskin
Canada Hemlock (<i>Tsuga can.</i>)	Seeds in small cones	Fair	Important food for chickadees

Shrubs	Food Attraction	Food Value	Birds Known to Eat Food
Running Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier stolonifera</i>)	Dark purple fruit in late July and early August	Excellent	Baltimore oriole, blue jay, brown thrasher, cardinal, catbird, cedar waxwing, junco, robin, Northern flicker
Black Chokeberry (<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>)	Black fruit into late winter	Good	21 species - brown thrasher, catbird
Barberries (<i>Berberis</i>)	Red fruit, autumn - winter	Fair	Catbird, cedar waxwing, junco, tree sparrow, robin, song sparrow
Silky Dogwood (<i>Cornus amomum</i>)	Pale blue fruit, September-October	Excellent	93 species - cardinal, catbird, thrushes, robin, downy woodpecker, brown thrasher
Gray Dogwood (<i>Cornus racemosa</i>)	White fruit in September-October	Excellent	93 species - cardinal, catbird, thrushes, robin, downy woodpecker, brown thrasher
Redosier Dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)	White fruit in September-October, not as prolific fruiter as other dogwoods	Good	93 species - cardinal, catbird, thrushes, robin, downy woodpecker, brown thrasher
American Filbert (<i>Corylus americana</i>)	Nut	Good	Preferred food for blue jay, hairy woodpecker
Eastern Wahoo (<i>Euonymus</i>)	Pink to crimson capsules open to orange fruit	Good	Bluebird, brown thrasher, cardinal, catbird, Northern flicker, robin, towhee, scarlet tanager
Winterberry (<i>Ilex verticillata</i>)	Red or orange berries in October - November	Excellent	Bluebird, purple finch, robin, catbird, cedar waxwing
Northern Bayberry (<i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>)	Gray waxy fruits in winter	Good	Black capped chickadee, bluebird, catbird, downy woodpecker, phoebe, warbler
American Plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>)	Purplish plum in early fall	Good	Pheasant, red-head woodpecker, robin
Nanking Cherry (<i>Prunus tomentosa</i>)	Red cherries in August	Good	84 species
Sumacs (<i>Rhus</i>)	Clusters of red berries	Good	Over 20 species - Evening grosbeak, robin, red-eyed vireo
Rugosa Rose (<i>Rosa rugosa</i>)	Large red hips, autumn into late winter	Good	Over 20 species - black capped chickadee, cardinal, wood thrush
Virginia Rose (<i>Rosa virginiana</i>)	Medium sized red hips into late winter	Good	Over 20 species - black capped chickadee, cardinal, wood thrush
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus</i>)	Small black berries in August	Excellent	Most important food in August . Over 100 species
Common Snowberry (<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>)	White fruit, autumn to winter	Good	Over 36 species -robin, cedar waxwings, pine and evening grosbeak
Yews (<i>Taxus</i>)	Red berry-like fruit	Fair	Cedar waxwing, robin, wood thrush
Witherod Viburnum (<i>Viburnum cassinoides</i>)	Pink fruit turning blue in autumn	Good	35 kinds of birds
Arrowwood Viburnum (<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>)	Small blue fruit in autumn	Good	35 kinds of birds
Wayfaringtree Viburnum (<i>Viburnum lantana</i>)	Red fruit changing to blue-black in August	Good	35 kinds of birds
Nannyberry Viburnum (<i>Viburnum lentago</i>)	Blue black fruit in fall hanging on into winter	Fair	35 kinds of birds
Blackhaw Viburnum (<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>)	Blue black fruit in autumn hanging on into winter	Fair	35 kinds of birds
Am. Cranberrybush Viburnum (<i>Viburnum trilobum</i>)	Red fruit into late winter	Fair	35 kinds of birds
Weigela (<i>Weigela florida</i>)	Flower nectar	Good	Hummingbird

Vines	Food Attraction	Food Value	Birds Known to Eat Food
American Bittersweet (<i>Celastrus scandens</i>)	Orange-red fruits in autumn into mid-winter	Good	Bluebird, red-eyed vireo, robin
Yellow-flowered Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera prolifera</i>)	Red berries in August - September	Good	Over 20 species - cedar waxwing, bluejay, red-eyed vireo, robin, junco, catbird
Virginia Creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>)	Bluish black berries in September - October	Good	Over 35 species - Black eyed chickadee, junco, rose-breasted grosbeak, downy woodpecker
Carrion Vine (<i>Smilax herbacea</i>)	Globe clusters of black berries in winter	Fair	19 species - Northern mockingbird, warblers
Perennials	Food Attraction	Food Value	Birds Known to Eat Food
Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)	Seed	Good	House finch, goldfinch, junco
Little Bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	Tufted seed	Good	Junco, song sparrow
Cup Plant (<i>Silphium perfoliatum</i>)	Seed	Excellent	Goldfinch, purple finch

Cover and Nesting Plants for the Birds

Plants	Cover Value	Plants	Cover Value
Maples (<i>Acer</i>)	Good	American Plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>)	Excellent
Serviceberries (<i>Amelanchier</i>)	Fair	Cherries & Chokecherries (<i>Prunus</i>)	Fair
Birch (<i>Betula</i>)	Fair	Oaks (<i>Quercus</i>)	Fair
Musclewood (<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>)	Fair	Mountainash (<i>Sorbus</i>)	Fair
Hackberry (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>)	Fair	Arborvitae (<i>Thuja</i>)	Good
Hawthorns (<i>Crataegus</i>)	Excellent	Canada Hemlock (<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>)	Good
Ash (<i>Fraxinus</i>)	Fair	Dogwoods (<i>Cornus</i>)	Good
Junipers (<i>Juniperus</i>)	Good	Ninebark (<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>)	Excellent (Nesting)
Magnolias (<i>Magnolia</i>)	Fair	Roses (<i>Rosa</i>)	Excellent
Ornamental Crabapples (<i>Malus</i>)	Good	Elderberry (<i>Sambucus</i>)	Fair
Ironwood (<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>)	Fair	Yew (<i>Taxus</i>)	Fair
Spruce (<i>Picea</i>)	Excellent	Viburnums (<i>Viburnum</i>)	Good
Pines (<i>Pinus</i>)	Good	Blackhaw Viburnum (<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>)	Excellent
Quaking Aspen (<i>Populus trem.</i>)	Fair		

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