

Birdscaping

How to attract birds to your landscape

There's no better sign of spring than when the songbirds sing. Besides the sound and beauty that birds bring to the landscape, you practical folks should know that birds also are great for eating many of the "bad" bugs that otherwise would eat your plants.

There's more to attracting birds to your yard than just setting out a bird feeder or two. An effective "birdscape" has four main components: food, water, shelter and a place for bird mummies to nest.

A yard that's mostly wide open lawn has little interest for birds. The more you can do to provide those four bird-friendly features, the more feathered friends you'll see.

Different species of birds have different likes and needs within those four categories, so the key to attracting LOTS of birds is to supply a diverse landscape.

Some birds like berries, others prefer seeds. Some like to nest in evergreens, others prefer dense shrubs or thorned bushes. Some birds like to hide out in smaller shrubs, others prefer the top of a tall tree.

Diverse doesn't mean you have to trade in your neat, well kept landscape for a wild-looking, overgrown jungle. A birdscape can be both good-looking to people and attractive to birds.

Feeders and foods

Bird feeders can help supplement bird diets when natural food supplies are low, particularly in late winter and early spring.



An estimated 80 percent of a typical bird's diet comes from natural foods. During breeding season, most birds favor insects and worms. Otherwise, they rely heavily on plant parts—fruits, seeds, flower nectar, vegetable seedlings, nuts, acorns and even pine cones.

A great way to attract birds, then, is to plant a variety of these types of plants. Birds especially appreciate a landscape in which berries, seeds and other edibles are spread out throughout the whole year.

To accommodate that need, you might consider serviceberries and blueberries for late-spring and early-summer food; viburnum, dogwood, cotoneaster and Oregon grapeholly for late-summer and fall food, and crabapples, winterberry and hawthorn for winter food.

Also plant a variety of flowers (see back for a bird-friendly list) and leave the seed heads on over the winter.

Water needs

A water garden or pond is a bird's second best friend, besides regular food. If you don't have that, a water-filled dish or birdbath or two will do. Either way, the idea is to provide a regular source of fresh, clean water for drinking and bathing. (Replace birdbath water every day or two and scrub it out weekly.)

Keep in mind that birds don't like deep water. If your pond doesn't have shallow edges, provide a few rough rocks along the perimeter.

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Shelter from predators and weather

Birds have lots of enemies that try to eat them and their eggs. They also have to deal with wind, snow and assorted nasty weather

Dense shrubs and trees such as spruce, yews, arborvitae, hemlocks, hollies and junipers are several bird favorites. Don't forget a few taller trees for the species that like tree tops.

Place your feeders and birdbaths 10 to 20 feet away from shelter plants. Any farther and birds may be too timid to venture out. Too close and you've given cats a hiding place, too!

A place to nest

Again, variety is the key when providing a place for bird moms to lay eggs and nurture their young.

Robins like sturdy crotches of small trees. Cardinals are big fans of forsythia and beautybush. Song sparrows like the thorny protection of raspberry bushes. And you'll make bluebirds happy with a nesting box.

The point is, the more of these nesting areas you provide, the more successful you'll be at attracting a variety of birds.

You'll also help them out by making sure they have a steady supply of nest-building materials, such as string, grass, twigs, little strips of paper and even hair.

What else you can do

If you don't have any taller grass nearby (such as along a pond), consider planting a cluster of ornamental grasses for birds that like to nest in grass.

Some birds also like to nest in wood, brush or rock piles, so if you have an out-of-the-way spot for those, that would be a bonus. If you grow vines such as trumpet creeper, wild grape or morning glory over the piles, you'll be even MORE popular with the birds.

When choosing plants, try to stick with natives that birds know and like. They aren't as fond of most exotics.

Finally, try to cut down on or cut out spraying insecticides. No bugs means no food for a bird. Also, sprays may harm birds if they come into contact with the material or if they eat bugs that have ingested a pesticide.

Following is a list of some of the best plants for attracting birds to your yard.

If birds could go plant-shopping, this would be their list!

Trees for birds

American Elm
Ash
Dogwood
Cherry (fruiting)
Crabapple
Hawthorn
Magnolia
Maple
Oak
Redbud
River Birch
Serviceberry

Evergreens for birds

Arborvitae
Falsecypress
Fir
Hemlock

Holly

Juniper
Pine
Spruce
Yew

Shrubs for birds

Bayberry
Beautybush
Blackberry
Burning bush
Butterfly bush
Carolina allspice
Coralberry
Cotoneaster
Elderberry
Forsythia
Gooseberry
Hydrangea
Ninebark

Oregon grapeholly
Potentilla
Pyracantha
Raspberry
Red osier dogwood
Roses (rugosa type)
St. John's wort
Spicebush
Viburnum
Virginia sweetspire
Winterberry
Witch hazel

Vines for birds

Boston ivy
Honeysuckle
Grape
Morning glory
Scarlet runner beans
Silver lace vine

Trumpet creeper

Perennials for birds

Anise hyssop
Aster
Black-eyed Susan
Boltonia
Butterfly weed
Coneflower
Coralbells (Heuchera)
Coreopsis
Gaillardia
Goldenrod
Ornamental grasses
Phlox
Salvia
Sunflower
Strawberries
Verbascum
Yarrow