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GARDENING FOR BIRDS

The design of your landscape and the way you garden can bring more birds to your yard year round. In the summer they will help control insects and in the winter they will enliven an otherwise grim scene. Birds need cover, nesting sites, water, and food if they are going to call your yard home. The most active bird habitat consists of “edges”, where different habitats meet. These areas include a mix of foods and shelters.

Fortunately, your yard probably includes just such edges, where trees and shrubs open onto lawn areas. It won't take much to increase its attraction to birds. The easiest way to provide cover and nesting sites is my planting a diverse selection of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs. Where space allows, plant in masses rather than dotting specimens around the yard. Include shade trees, small flowering trees, shrubs and ground covers in order to create a variety of vertical habitats. Select plants which flower and fruit at different times of the year so that there is always something for the birds and your. You don't have to give up your flower garden either. Many favorite flowers attract hummingbirds and butterflies, and when they go to seed they become food for birds.

Designing a landscape that attracts birds is not much different from designing a beautiful landscape for your family and guests. There are, though, a few changes that should be made in the way the landscape is maintained:

First, birds need water for drinking and bathing throughout the year. If your yard doesn't have a small pond, stream or fountain that can be kept free of ice, then a shallow birdbath can be provided. This can be simple and homemade or formal, to suit your design.

Second, some birds, such as sparrows and juncos, prefer to scratch around in leaf litter for seeds, and they will appreciate areas left un-raked. These can be under shrubs and at the backs of borders.

Third, when pruning trees and shrubs, especially in the spring, care must be taken not to disturb nests. Become aware of where birds are nesting and delay pruning those plants.

Gardening for birds is a fun way to work with nature, beautify your yard, and learn about wildlife at the same time. With some good books, a pair of binoculars, and a field guide to local birds, you'll learn all about those strangers hiding in your bushes.

Suggested Reading:

The Audobon Society Guide to Attracting Birds
Stephen W. Kress, Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1985

Gardening for Wildlife, Brooklyn Botanic Garden
"Plants & Gardens" Series, Vol. 43, no 3, 1987

Songbirds in your Garden
John K. Terres, Harper & Row, 1987

PLANTS FOR BIRDS

TREES

Ash
Beech
Birch
Cherry
Crabapple
Dogwood
Hackberry
Hawthorn
Hemlock
Hickory
Holly
Larch
Maple
Oak
Olive
Pine
Sassafras
Serviceberry
Spruce
Sumac
Sweetgum
Tupelo
Tulip Poplar

PERENNIALS

Aster
Campanula
Chrysanthemum
Columbine
Coneflower
Coreopsis
Dianthus
For-Me-Not
Gaillardia
Phlox
Rudbeckia
Sunflower

ANNUALS

Bachelor Buttons
California Poppy
Cosmos
Four O'clocks
Larkspur
Marigold
Mexican Sunflower
Moss Rose
Petunia
Sunflower
Verbena
Zinnia

SHRUBS

Arbovitae
Bayberry
Beautyberry
Brambles
Buckthorn
Chokeberry
Coralberry
Cotoneaster
Dogwood
Lderberry
Euonymous
Firethorn
Honeysuckle
Juniper
Rose
Spicebush
Viburnum

VINES

Bittersweet
Boston Ivy
Grape
Porcelain Berry

