

Creating a Bird Friendly Garden

Now that the weather is turning colder and autumn leaves are falling, it's time to think about our feathered friends. Songbirds brighten up our gardens throughout the fall and winter by adding color, movement and music on even the darkest days ahead. What can you do to attract and help the survival of a wide array of feathered visitors? Your garden is just the beginning for creating a suitable bird-friendly habitat.

Benefits of a bird friendly garden

Urban and suburban areas are constantly expanding, destroying and altering natural areas and wild bird habitats. By making your garden more attractive to birds, you'll be providing an oasis for birds, improving their chances of surviving the winter. Not only will the birds benefit, you will too with the pleasure of seeing and hearing an ever increasing variety and number of colorful songbirds in your garden.

Provide a source of food

To create a well-designed bird friendly garden, be sure to provide the critical elements that birds need for survival, that is **food**, **shelter** and **water**. For starters, make an assessment of what your garden is already providing and what it is lacking. Are there some fruit or berry bearing trees, shrubs or vines in your garden? If not, consider planting Dogwoods, Crabapples, Viburnums, Virginia creeper or other plants that bear fruits and berries to provide non-migratory birds with a treat all winter. Even the flower heads of perennial and annual flowers, if left on the plants in the late summer and fall to ripen, will provide seeds for foraging birds. The seed of purple coneflower is a favorite of the American Goldfinch. A wide variety of birds will love the seed from the sunflowers growing in your garden that are left in place to ripen.

Trees and shrubs that make the best shelter

Does your garden have trees and shrubs with dense evergreen foliage or thickets of deciduous shrubs? These plants provide protective cover for birds to escape harsh weather and predators, safe roosting (sleeping) at night and for nesting. Trees like spruce and red cedar provide excellent cover and nesting sites for a variety of songbirds including

Northern Cardinals who especially prefer to nest in the dense protective foliage of evergreens. Also consider planting hedges or growing vines along a fence or on a trellis.

Even an out of the way corner of the property can be turned into a bird friendly habitat when densely planted with evergreen and deciduous trees, shrubs and vines to simulate a natural environment. Even a pile of dead branches and brush in an out of the way place in your garden will provide birds with protection from harsh weather and predators.

While some birds like Cardinals prefer to build their nests in the protective cover of evergreens or thickets, others prefer the cavity of a hollow tree. No hollow trees on your property? Provide songbirds such as bluebirds, finches, wrens and chickadees with a place to nest and raise their young by mounting a nesting box or birdhouse on a post or tree trunk. Birds aren't fussy, a plain unpainted box or house will be just fine. Nesting boxes simulate a cavity in a hollow tree trunk.

Place nesting boxes or birdhouses high enough where predators, especially cats, can't reach. Make sure

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nesting boxes and birdhouses have removable panels for easy cleaning. Clean them out in late summer or fall when nesting season is over and return them to their original spot. Some birds, like Chickadees, will often use nesting boxes and birdhouses for roosting during snowstorms and bad weather.

Nothing attracts birds like water

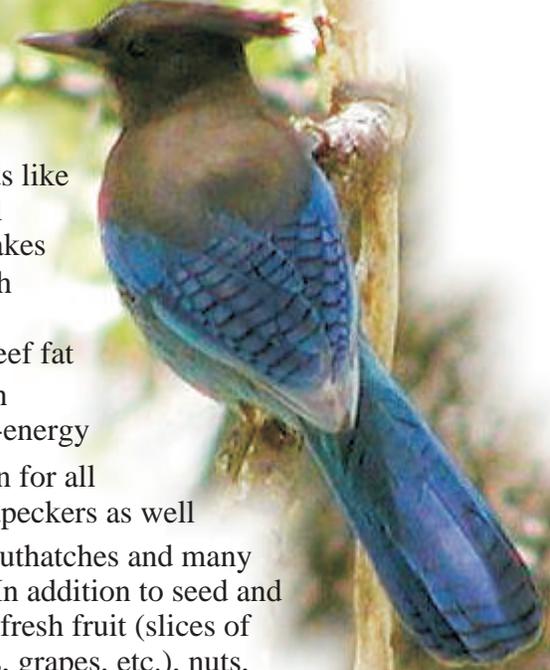
Does your garden have a water feature? Even something as simple as a birdbath or even a tray or shallow dish of water will be irresistible to many songbirds for drinking and bathing. Be sure to provide fresh, clean water on a daily basis. Use an electric birdbath warmer to keep the water in birdbaths and trays from freezing. Or maybe a pond or water garden is your cup of tea. Just be sure to provide a shallow area near the edge of the pond with some flat rocks where smaller birds can wade in or safely drink from the edge. Keeping the water circulating with a small pump will prevent the pond from completely freezing in cold weather.

Right now birds are beginning to search out food sources and set up foraging patterns for the cold months ahead. This is the perfect time to set up bird feeding stations throughout your garden to begin offering seed, suet and other foods. Most seed-eating wild birds like Cardinals and Chickadees love black oil sunflower or a seed mix. Offer it in a hopper type or raised open platform feeder since some birds prefer a flat place to stand on while feeding. Or perhaps you'd like to be a bit more selective. Try matching the foods with the types of birds you like. Special tube feeders with tiny portals filled with Nyjer seed, for example will attract American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins (a close relative). Tube feeders with larger, one-inch wide portals, filled with sunflower seed will be a favorite of Chickadees and Nuthatches. Low tray feeders set near the ground filled with a wild bird seed mix are great for attracting and feeding ground-feeding wild birds such as Mourning Doves and Sparrows.

Insect-eating birds like woodpeckers will appreciate suet cakes hung in wire mesh baskets. Suet is a combination of beef fat and seed and is an inexpensive high-energy source of nutrition for all varieties of Woodpeckers as well as Chickadees, Nuthatches and many other songbirds. In addition to seed and suet, try offering fresh fruit (slices of apples or oranges, grapes, etc.), nuts, dried fruit and even left over pasta, pastry or baked goods (cakes, cookies, muffins, etc.) as a special treat for birds. They'll especially appreciate the pastries and baked goods, which are a good source of energy from fats and oils. Birds need the extra calories for just keeping warm during very cold weather.

For maximum enjoyment be sure to place birdbaths, feeders, nesting boxes and birdhouses close to or near a window just outside the view from your favorite easy chair or where they can be viewed from a kitchen table or breakfast nook. Also place them close to trees and shrubs that will provide cover and a quick escape from predators. Space them far enough apart (15 to 20 ft.) from each other so they don't interfere with each other. Birds will prefer nesting boxes and birdhouses that are placed in quiet, out of the way areas away from feeder and birdbath activity and away from traffic, people and other birds.

With a little thought and planning, your garden can be transformed into a bird-friendly sanctuary that will provide you with many hours of year 'round enjoyment.



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Recommended Bird-Friendly Plants

Trees

Mulberries (<i>Morus</i>)	Berries are a favorite of over 40 bird species.
Dogwoods (<i>Cornus florida</i> , <i>C. kousa</i> & <i>C. mas</i>)	Fruits are a favorite of many bird species.
Crabapples (<i>Malus</i>)	Fruits, flowers and buds are eaten by birds. Also provides shelter and nesting sites.
Red Cedar (<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>)	Berries are eaten by birds. Provides shelter and nesting sites.
Spruce (<i>Picea</i>)	Seeds are eaten by birds. Provides shelter and nesting sites.
Serviceberries (<i>Amelanchier</i>)	Berries are a favorite of many birds.
Arborvitae (<i>Thuja</i>)	Seed is eaten by birds. Provide shelter and nesting sites.

Shrubs

Beautyberry (<i>Callicarpa</i>)	Fruit is eaten by many bird species.
Chokeberry (<i>Aronia</i>)	Fruit is a favorite of many birds.
Euonymus	Seeds are eaten by birds. Provides shelter.
Rose (<i>Rosa</i>)	Rose hips (fruit and seed) are eaten by birds. Provides shelter.
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus</i>)	Fruit and shelter.
Viburnum (<i>Viburnum</i>)	Fruit and shelter.



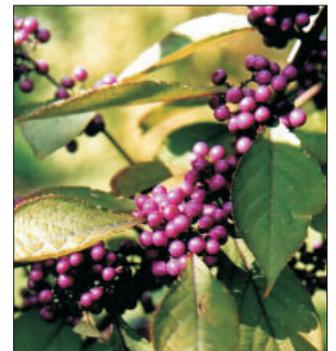
Crabapples (*Malus*)



Dogwoods (*Cornus kousa*)



Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)



Beautyberry (*Callicarpa*)



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Vines

American Bittersweet	Fruit and shelter.
Honeysuckle Vine	Fruit and shelter.
Wild Grapes (<i>Vitis species</i>) (<i>Lonicera</i>)(<i>Celastrus scandens</i>)	Fruit is eaten by more than 50 bird species. Provides shelter and nesting sites.

Perennials

Black-eyed-Susans (<i>Rudbeckia</i>)	Seed.
Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea</i>)	Seed. A favorite of Goldfinch.
Joe-Pye Weed (<i>Eupatorium</i>)	Seed.
Ornamental Grasses	Seed and shelter.

Annuals

Cosmos	Seed.
Sunflowers	Seed.

About Your Expert

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PlantAmerica Horticulturist Donna Moramarco (a.k.a. “Donna in the Garden”) has been helping gardeners solve problems and achieve their dreams for over two decades. Donna has degrees in horticulture and education plus over 20 years as a Cornell University extension horticulturist.



Black-eyed-Susans (*Rudbeckia*)



Sunflower



Ornamental Grass
Pennisetum alopecuroides



Wild Grapes (*Lonicera*)