

Trees, Shrubs & Perennials for Attracting Birds and Other Wildlife



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Creating a backyard oasis that mimics the wilderness is the goal of many wildlife enthusiasts. While others install fences, put out poison baits or chemical deterrents, these people want to attract birds, critters, and even deer to their gardens.

- Our desire to tidy and groom our landscapes, whether spraying the lawn with pesticides, raking up leaf litter, or pruning shrubs and trees to rigid shapes, is not friendly to wildlife.
- A typical yard with lawn, raked flower beds, and specimen shade trees does not provide the diversity needed to attract wildlife. It may be tidy, but it provides habitat for very few native species.
- “Wildscaping”, on the other hand, growing a variety of native or adapted plants in a natural arrangement that includes diverse shapes, colors, flowers, and fruits, is a boon to wildlife.
- Start small: choose an area of lawn to replace with a mix of native shrubs, perennial flowers, and wild grasses. By selecting plants that provide different heights and forms, foliage, flowers and an assortment of fruits and seeds, you’ll add interest - both human and wild - year round.
- A “wild” garden doesn’t have to look sloppy: Arrange the plants to enhance the space they’ll occupy, considering their eventual shape, size, and habit of growth and bloom.
- Cluster plants for maximum impact by grouping 3 or 5 plants of the same species. Placing clusters to contrast colors, foliage, and blooming time creates a garden that is more natural in appearance.
- Add structural diversity by mixing tall plants, mid-sized and shorter plants, and ground-hugging plants to allow wildlife to move from one part of the wildscape to another. Strips of plants running between different habitat areas allow small critters a corridor for safe travel.
- Resist tidiness: leave organic litter in place to mulch the soil, don’t cut back dead stalks until spring to leave seeds for food, prune thoughtfully, and avoid using pesticides.
- Dead leaves may hide the cocoons of butterflies; a dense tree provides camouflage and thermal protection for the tiny nests of hummingbirds.
- If you have pest problems, start with the least invasive remedy. Many pesticides kill everything they encounter – including beneficial insects.
- Learn what a weed is and what a native plant is. Native plants are important for their established relationships with wildlife and other plants. Even if they do not suit our aesthetics, native plants are the backbone of wild communities.

Attract Birds to Your Yard and Garden

- It takes more than a feeder and a birdbath to make your yard truly bird friendly. Birds need a complete habitat that provides food, shelter, nesting areas, and singing posts from which to defend their territories.

A Bird Pantry

Birds get their food not only from the fruits of plants but from their buds, flowers, and nectar. You may want to select plants that provide food in each of these ways.

- Select plants to provide food for birds in every season. Fruits ripen in different seasons. Plants with spring-ripening fruits that feed new parent birds include serviceberries, wild cherries, and mulberries.

Common Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 60' and spread 40'
- *This tree is generally liked by songbirds; fruit is a small blue berry that persists through winter.* NATIVE

Season – Fall/Winter

Nesting - Fair



Washington Hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 20' and spread 15'
- *Dense tree with long thorns provides good cover for birds; red berries persist through winter.*

Season – Fall/Winter

Nesting - Good



Rocky Mountain Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Excellent
- Mature height 20 to 40' and spread 3 to 15'
- Common cultivars: Cologreen, Gray Gleam, Moonglow
- *Birds eat the seeds; dense foliage used as cover.* NATIVE

Season – Fall/Winter

Nesting - Excellent



Flowering Crabapple (*Malus* spp.)

- Food Quality – Excellent
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 15 to 25' and spread 10 to 20'
- Many cultivars available
- *Select disease resistant cultivars; fruit eaten by birds and mammals.*

Season – Summer/Winter

Nesting - Good



Colorado Spruce (*Picea pungens*)

- Food Quality – Fair
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 60' and spread 25'
- *Valuable as cover; provides habitat for various bird species.* NATIVE

Season – Fall

Nesting - Good



Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 50' and spread 25'
- *Very drought tolerant; seeds are eaten by numerous birds and small mammals, also used for cover.* NATIVE

Season – Fall

Nesting - Good



Southwestern White pine (*Pinus strobiformis*)

- Food Quality – Fair
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 40' and spread 30'
- *More important as cover for various wildlife; seeds eaten by birds and small mammals.* NATIVE

Season – Fall

Nesting - Good



Gambel Oak (*Quercus gambellii*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 15 - 30' and spread 12 - 20'
- *A hardy, xeric tree with a shrubby growth habit, favored by a variety of wildlife.* NATIVE

Season – Fall/Winter

Nesting - Fair



Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)

- Food Quality – Excellent
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 50' and spread 30'
- *Excellent fall color; acorn liked by numerous birds and animals*

Season – Fall/Winter
Nesting - Fair



Swedish Whitebeam (*Sorbus intermedia*)

- Food Quality – Excellent
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 15' and spread 12'
- *Creamy white flowers, showy bright orange berries in fall; hardy and tolerant of alkaline soils.*

Season – Fall
Nesting - Good

SHRUBS

Four Wing Saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 5' and spread 5'
- *Upright spreading habit; a four-winged fruit appears in late summer on female plants, may become rose-tinted in fall. Seeds eaten by birds. NATIVE*

Season – Fall
Nesting - Good



Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 6' and spread 5'
- *Tubular flowers are attractive to hummingbirds as well as butterflies; available in blue, pink, purple, red and white.*

Season – Summer
Nesting - Good

Peking Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster acutifolius*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Excellent
- Mature height 10' and spread 5'
- *Fruit favored by Robins. Small pink blossoms turn to black fruit; orange-red fall color.*

Season – Fall/Winter
Nesting - Good

Waxflower (*Jamesia americana*)

- Food Quality – Excellent
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 5' and spread 4'
- *Intensely fragrant and showy clusters of waxy, white flowers. Attractive to bees and butterflies, seeds are favored by birds. NATIVE*

Season – Fall
Nesting - Good



Boulder Raspberry (*Oreobatus deliciosus*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Good
- Mature height 6' and spread 6'
- *Very hardy, tolerant of dry, sandy soils; arching growth habit. Fruit is eaten by a variety of wildlife. NATIVE*

Season – Summer/Fall
Nesting - Fair



Penstemon (*Penstemon* spp.)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 12 -30” and spread 12-18”
- *Attractive to hummingbirds; sparrows and finches also feed on the seeds. Beautiful tubular flowers in colors of red, pink, yellow, blue and purple.* NATIVE

Season –Summer - Fall
Nesting - Poor



Prairie Coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 18 - 24” and spread 18 - 24”
- *This drought tolerant plant is easy to establish, naturalizes readily. Seed heads are attractive to finches.* NATIVE

Season –Summer/Fall
Nesting - Fair



Salvia (*Salvia sylvestris* × ‘Mainacht’)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 24” and spread 12-18”
- *Attractive to hummingbirds; sparrows and finches also feed on the seeds. Grayish-green leaves persist throughout winter; blooms all summer long.*

Season –Summer - Fall
Nesting - Poor



Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

- Food Quality – Good
- Cover – Fair
- Mature height 3 -4’ and spread 2’
- *Blue-gray foliage turns red to orange in the fall. Great winter seed source.* NATIVE

Season –Winter
Nesting - Poor

