

Invite More Birds into Your Garden

Birds bring color, song, motion and beauty into the garden. Many have a voracious appetite or insect pests, too. When designing a new garden, choose plants that welcome more birds.

All birds need to make a home in your garden is a source of food, water and shelter. You could simply put up a feeder in the backyard to provide food, and that will certainly bring some types of birds into the garden. But many insect- and fruit-eating birds never visit feeders, and to attract permanent residents, shelter and nesting sites are also necessary.

Plant a wide variety of trees and shrubs to encourage the greatest number of birds. Trees and shrubs most attractive to birds are those that provide lots of seeds or berries, and also those that support plenty of insects.

Mulberry, maple, pine, cherry, serviceberry, oak and beech are all good choices. Bayberry, dogwood, viburnum, sumac, juniper, holly and elderberry are more options.

Trees and shrubs that hold their fruit over winter are particularly good choices. Crabapple, hawthorn and cranberry viburnum all fall into this group.

The best mix of trees and shrubs will include both deciduous and evergreen species. Evergreens have the added advantage of offering both shelter from the elements and protection from predators.

Thorny plants like Japanese barberry and rugosa roses provide excellent cover and rose hips are a favorite food as well.

Many vines are attractive to birds for their fruits; for the cover they provide; and for nesting purposes. Honeysuckle, grape, Virginia creeper, bittersweet, trumpet vine, and clematis are all vines to consider. Annual vines like morning glory and cardinal creeper also provide cover and fill in a young landscape while waiting for slower-growing varieties to mature.

Annual and perennial flowers provide food for birds in the form of flowers, seed heads, and the insects these plants support.

Finches and goldfinches favor the seeds of annual cosmos, marigold and zinnia. Sunflowers are the favorites of many species. Quaking grass, love grass, globe thistle, black-eyed Susan, goldenrod, purple coneflower, and aster are perennial favorites.

Other plants attract insect-eating birds. Annuals and biennials that fall into this category include hyssop, dame's rocket and mealy-cup sage. Perennials include butterfly bush, phlox, sedum and gayfeather.

To maintain your bird-friendly landscape, prune minimally. Let trees and shrubs grow into their natural shapes to provide cover and encourage nesting. When you do have to prune, do so after flowering to maximize next year's flower and fruit production. Also, be sure to leave some seed heads on garden flowers for the finches and other seed-eating birds.

To attract the largest variety of birds, plant the garden with areas of shade and sun. Old stumps or dead trees left standing provide food and shelter for birds such as woodpeckers, flickers and nuthatches. And the bird-friendly garden should be kept as free of chemicals as possible.

Birds need water, both for drinking and for bathing. A birdbath, either purchased or improvised, will work. Be sure it has sloping slides and a rough area for footing. Place it near low-growing shrubs or other shelter so birds can escape from predators.

Most importantly, make sure the garden is visible from the house or a deck or patio so you can enjoy all the color and beauty birds bring to the garden.

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