

Befriending Our Feathered Friends
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Welcoming birds into your yard is a stimulating perk to gardening. Not only are they fascinating to watch, but they eat insects and that can be a very good thing. Although many birds have vacated the premises for the winter, a few seed and berry-eating species remain. There are two ways to encourage a vibrant backyard bird population: 1) setting up bird feeders, houses and baths; 2) adding specific plants to your landscape.

Like most living things, food, water and shelter top the list of necessities. Because the majority of insects are absent this time of year, birdfeeders would certainly be appreciated. Feeders that hold specific seeds attract particular types of birds. For instance, finches like thistle. Another popular bird food is black sunflower seed, as is suet because of the high fat content. Mixed blends of seeds may be less expensive, but many have fillers which birds won't eat. These fillers get chucked to the ground where other varmints (squirrels, mice, etc) devour it. Positioning the feeders in sheltered places free from predators and inclement weather is important. Providing different sized homes as well as keeping a birdbaths filled, clean and unfrozen are welcomed additions.

When planting, remember the gardener's mantra "right plant, right place." This is also true in landscaping to attract birds. When other food sources are limited or exhausted, plants with winter persistent fruit or seed include: Chokeberry, Crabapple, Hackberry, Hawthorn, Holly, Bayberry, Firethorn, Sumac, and Shrub Rose.

Nesting time begins in late spring and extends into mid summer, a time when birds need plenty of food to nurture their young. Plant choices to help supplement their diets at this time are: Red Buckeye, Serviceberry, Birch, Blueberry, Strawberry, Bee Balm, and Honeysuckle.

Although most plants produce fruit or seed during late summer and early fall, it can be a life saver for many birds who are either preparing to migrate or making preparations for the winter. Worthy plant selections offering late summer to fall food are: Dogwood, Crabapple, Elderberry, Viburnum, Aster, Daisy, Sunflower, and Bittersweet.

The list of bird attracting plants (including perennials and annuals) is extensive. But whether you prefer to add feeders and shelter or make additions to your landscape, your efforts will be appreciated and rewarded by frequent feathered visitors.