



Bringing Wildlife Home

Create a Bird-friendly Habitat

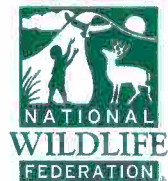


Birding is the number one sport in America. Get started by observing birds in your own bird-friendly wildlife habitat.

For lists of bird species that may be helped by your bird-friendly habitat – whether it is urban, suburban, or rural – visit the website audubonathome.org.

- **Provide water year-round** - A simple birdbath is a great start. Change water every 2-3 days in warm weather to prevent mosquito larvae from hatching and use a heater in the winter. Place the water container about 10 feet from dense shrubs or other cover that predators may use.
- **Install native plants** - Select a variety of native plants to offer year-round food in the form of seeds, berries, nuts, and nectar. Try to recreate the plant ecosystem native to your area. Evergreen trees and shrubs provide excellent cover through all seasons, if they are part of your local ecosystem. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center has lists of recommended native plants by region and state at www.wildflower.org/collections.
- **Remove invasive plants from your wildlife habitat** - Many invasive plants out-compete the native species favored by birds, insects and other wildlife. To find a list of invasive plants in your state go to the USDA Plants Database at plants.usda.gov/java/noxiousDriver (case-sensitive URL) or speak with your local Cooperative Extension Office, which you can find at www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html.
- **Eliminate insecticides in your yard** - Insects are the primary source of food for many bird species and are an important source of protein and fats for growing juvenile birds.
- **Keep standing dead trees** - Standing dead trees (also known as ‘snags’) provide cavity-dwelling places for birds to raise young and a source of insects for food. Many species will also seek shelter from bad weather inside

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these hollowed out trees. Inspect your snags regularly to make sure they do not present any safety hazards.

- **Put out nesting boxes** - Make sure the boxes have ventilation holes near the top (but not in the roof, or water will leak in) and drainage holes below. Do not use a box with a perch, as house sparrows are known to sit on a nesting box perch and peck at other birds inside the nesting box. Be sure to monitor the boxes for invasive animal species such as European starlings or house sparrows, which are known to harm or outcompete native species.
- **Build a brush pile in a corner of your yard** - Start with larger logs and top with smaller branches. Some birds will hunt, roost or even nest in brush piles.
- **Offer food in feeders** - Bird feeders are great sources of supplemental food during times of food scarcity, and also enhance bird viewing opportunities.
- **Keep your cat indoors** - Domestic cats kill millions of birds every year.
- **Reduce your lawn area** - Lawns have little value to birds or other wildlife, and they require more energy for mowing, applying fertilizers and watering.
- **Observe and identify your bird visitors** - Find tips about birding and how to identify the birds in your habitat at www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/birding123.



Visit www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife for more information.

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Creating a Bird-Friendly Habitat

by Kris Wetherbee

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Creating a bird-friendly environment is simply a matter of providing the creature comforts we all crave: food, protective cover, and a cozy spot for raising a family.

A diversity of trees, shrubs, and other plants, as well as ground covers and vines, offers a complete package for backyard bird habitation. Invite birds into your backyard and start enjoying a front-row view of nature's winged wonders.

Food

Understanding a bird's preferences will help you determine which plants to grow. Different plants will provide for different needs, whether that bounty is in the form of seeds, fruits, nuts, or nectar, as well as for a host of plant-munching caterpillars and insects. A garden filled with a mixture of plants producing flowers, seeds, berries, and nuts will always attract the largest number and variety of birds.

- For example, seed-eating birds, including goldfinches, chickadees, and towhees, will seek out seed heads from an assortment of flowering plants and ornamental grasses. Any daisy-like flowers such as sunflowers, asters, and black-eyed Susans, in addition to rudbeckias, zinnias, and echinaceas, would be good choices.
- Finches, sparrows, and nuthatches are a few of the birds that will flock to marigolds, cosmos, coreopsis, goldenrod, phlox, and a wide selection of salvias.
- Hummingbirds are happy with nectar from bee balm, geraniums, veronicas, delphiniums, and penstemons.

Remember, too, that birds are attracted to seasonal food. They will stay longer in your garden if it contains plants that flower or fruit at different times of the year.

- For example, hollies and roses provide winter fruit.
- Serviceberries and chokecherries offer late-spring berries.
- Blueberries and mulberries bear summer fruit.
- Honeysuckle and pyracantha round out the fruit season in the fall.

Shelter

Plants that provide shelter—a safe haven from predators, protective cover from harsh weather, or a cozy spot, whether to nest or just settle in for the night—appeal to just about any bird, regardless of food preference. But a plant that provides food and shelter says, "Come on in."

- Pine trees provide evergreen shelter enjoyed by many birds as well as nourishing pine seeds favored by chickadees.
- Low-growing junipers not only hide birds from imminent danger, but also offer an insect buffet for ground–insect feeders such as wrens, towhees, and juncos, in addition to providing a bevy of berries for titmice and waxwings.
- Some vines and shrubs (like Virginia creeper, clematis, service berry, and privet) are also multifunctional plants. Towhees, larks, and sparrows enjoy the seed heads of their spent flowers, while fruit-eating birds such as robins, thrushes, and tanagers gorge on their berries. These vines and shrubs also provide a safe haven.

As you develop your garden, consider grouping your plants in layers. You'll be creating a multilevel habitat of food and shelter for a variety of birds, whether they feed on the ground, in trees and bushes, or in the air.

- Include fruit-bearing shrubs, deciduous trees, and evergreens of all heights in your upper layers.
- At ground level, consider planting ground covers as well as petite perennials and annuals.
- Fill the layers in between with perennials, annuals, ornamental grasses, and low-growing shrubs.

(See Related Articles above for a list of great Shrubs and Trees for Birds.)

When it all comes together, your garden just may become a bird's favorite place to be!

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