

Creating A Backyard Haven For Birds

Fortunately, creating a welcoming environment for birds looks roughly the same as a rich garden landscape. Start with a healthy diversity of plants, creating a wealth of blooms and drawing different types of insects. There should also be a good water feature, as formal as a birdbath or as integrated and natural as a pond in the corner of the garden. A food source that rounds out what they will find among the plants will also make your yard more attractive to winged visitors. Lastly, if you want the birds to extend their stay, you should provide them with living quarters suited to the way they nest and protected from potential predators.

Spring and summer are prime seasons for bird watching. Spring is also the time of year when you may get to observe birds you might not otherwise get a chance to see. As birds are migrating on the way to their normal breeding grounds, they make frequent stopovers along the way, taking advantage of landscapes that are blooming with life and food sources. If you have planted a diverse garden, it will pay big dividends, attracting many of these travelers to your yard.

When planning and planting your bird friendly garden select a mix of plants that will create three or more seasons of blooms, plus berries for the late summer, fall & winter. A mix of evergreen and deciduous flowering trees is also inviting. By letting your garden go in the autumn, plants that have gone to seed and even flowers that remain uncut and withered on the stalk will serve as valuable food sources as the weather turns cold. A thickly vegetated, diverse garden can offer food well into the winter, helping those birds that don't migrate. For some excellent plant choices, **check out our 'Pollinator Plant List'.**

Few birds can resist a refreshing splash of clean water – it's essentially a bird's version of a spa. The sound of splashing, moving water is very inviting and may increase your number of visitors significantly. A good water source not only supplies a place to frolic and bathe, but it also offers a cool drink. Your feature should have enough water for the birds to splash around in but not enough for them to have a swim. In addition, a water feature can be a lovely decorative, and soothing, accent to your garden.

The best way to attract an amazing array of birds to your yard is to offer them easily accessible food, and lots of it. Because their metabolisms are so fast, birds must eat frequently. The types of food birds eat are as varied as the birds themselves, but there are basically three types of diets: insects, vegetation and larger prey (such as fish and rodents). Most birds will eat a combination of these diets and will vary with the seasons. Choose feeders that serve the types of birds you want to attract and place them where the birds can reach it but other animals can't, it can also help to attach each feeder with a predator guard. Keep all feeders clean and filled so birds will make a point of coming to your feeders on a regular basis.

Here are some additional tips:

- In early spring cleanup bird feeders, nesting boxes and bird baths. Birds are susceptible to contaminants to thoroughly clean things with a little bit of bleach and hot water, allow them to dry thoroughly before restocking with food or water. If nesting boxes were used in previous season, replace in exactly the same spot.
- In late spring, after the mating season has begun, add crushed eggshells to your bird feeders to help pregnant mothers get all the calcium they need for egg laying. Eggshells will also keep blue jays from chipping the paint from your house in search of the extra calcium they require.
- Do not get too close to breeding birds, they may become stressed, frightened and in some cases may even abandon the nest with defenseless eggs left behind. For the same reason, do not touch any chicks you come across, even if you think the bird is in distress, leave it alone.
- The best feeder location is the safest location. Give birds a clear view in all directions, roughly a 10' diameter circle, so they can see any threat coming long before it arrives.
- Keeping birdhouses away from other birdhouses, feeders and baths will invite the greatest number of visitors to your yard. Most birds are very territorial and will drive away other potential occupants that are too close to the home they have chosen for themselves.
- If your birdhouse goes unused, change the location the following year and try adding cotton batting, fresh cotton balls, or fresh sawdust to make it more appealing.

Plants to Attract Birds in the Winter Months

<i>Common Name</i>	<i>Botanical Name</i>	<i>Food Sources</i>
Beautyberry	Callicarpa	berries
Chokeberry	Aronia	berries
Currants	Ribes	berries & flowers*
Dogwood	Cornus	berries
Huckleberries	Vaccinium	berries
Oregon Grape	Mahonia	berries & flowers*
Pink Dawn	Viburnum	flowers*
Salal	Gaultheria shallon	berries
Snowberry	Symphoricarpos	berries
Wax Myrtle	Myrica californica	berries
Witch Hazel	Hamamelis	flowers*

* Denotes that it attracts hummingbirds