

## HOW TO ATTRACT BIRDS TO YOUR GARDEN

From an article by Ron Allensen in Canadian Living.

By planting the right trees, shrubs and flowers, and providing a source of water, you can attract many bird species to your garden. As you walk along the path, you spot a Cardinal, enjoy the songs of sparrows and chickadees and watch robins feeding their young. A scene from nature? Yes, but you don't have to visit a conservation area or wilderness park to enjoy this. You could be in your own backyard, in a garden planned to attract birds. While many of us subscribe to the winter ritual of bird feeding, few of us give much thought to how we can keep our feathered visitors through the summer. Yet a well-executed landscaping plan can reward you with a garden full of birds. Certain trees, shrubs, vines and flowers provide a natural food supply and nesting sites that will encourage many species to your garden this summer. An added bonus any gardener will appreciate is the voracious appetite birds have for insects.

During nesting season, parent birds work from dawn to dusk to fill gaping-mouthed nestlings with insects from your garden. In fact, birds provide one of the most aggressive and effective natural controls of insect pests. The active little house wren, for example, is a superb insect hunter: in a single day researchers counted one diligent male wren making more than 1200 visits with insect food for his young. A solitary warbler has been known to destroy more than 3000 aphids in an hour. Even the often maligned starling constantly probes lawns for grubs and cut-worms and is one of the few birds that eats the destructive Japanese beetle. Although birds will not totally rid your garden of insect pests, they can help prevent infestations.

Since every bird species has its own habitat requirements, the birds you attract to your garden will be limited by the size and location of your property. The larger the area, the more trees, shrubs and annual plants you'll be able to grow to attract various species. If you have a large, rural property, or your land abuts a river or ravine, it offers the greatest potential for attracting birds. However, even small urban lots can be turned into bird oases. Once successfully attracted, the same birds usually return year after year. Even if you don't convince birds to stay and nest, many species will spend weeks visiting your yard on their Spring and Fall migrations. To check the range and habitat of the species you want to attract, refer to one of the readily available field guides, such as Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies* (fourth edition, distributed by Thomas Allen & Son Ltd.), or the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to Birds of North America and Birds of North America* (revised edition, 1983, distributed by Whitman Golden Ltd.).

### HOW TO ATTRACT BIRDS

The first step in creating a backyard habitat attractive to birds is to assess the vegetation on and around your lot. Sketch in your property on blocked graph paper, noting fences, patios and your current trees and shrubs. Keep in mind that mass plantings are more attractive to birds for nesting than are single specimens. After you've made your drawing, decide which plants you want and sketch these on your paper. These rough sketches will give you an idea of how many plants you need. Consulting a good nursery catalogue or the experts at your nursery along with the information in this article, select plants best suited to your soil and weather conditions. Choose plants that will complement your existing landscape. Remember, the area should be attractive to you and the birds you want to attract. Where mature shade trees already exist, adding thickets of evergreen shrubs or smaller trees will make them more appealing to birds. If they're suitable for your area, the flowering dogwood (*Cornus chinensis*) are unsurpassed as smaller trees that thrive in partial shade. The fruit of the dogwood is relished by more than 100 songbird species.

### WHAT TO PLANT

Most birds prefer particular spots to forage and nest. By providing choice nesting sites and a good selection of food for your favourite birds, you're more likely to attract them as permanent residents. Keep in mind the visual effect of the plants you select as they go through the seasons. Spring flowering shrubs and trees are most striking against an evergreen backdrop. Don't overlook fall foliage colour, interesting bark colour or cones. The best time to plant trees and shrubs is in the spring. When selecting certain cultivars and hybrid species, be sure you are getting fertile plants; with certain junipers and the bittersweet, bayberry, holly and mulberry plants, you must have a male and a female plant to ensure the production of fruit.

### ENCOURAGE BIRDS TO NEST

Here are some suggestions of plantings that attract specific birds for nesting. The first spring robins and mourning doves usually nest in spruces, cedars or other dense evergreens that offer protection. Later robins build nests in lilacs or maples. Cardinals usually choose sites in dense shrubs or small trees close to your house, while blue jays prefer dense, isolated trees such as tall spruces. The catbird, or brown thrasher, chooses thick, briary or tangled vines. The yellow warbler builds its soft, woolly nest in the forked branches of shrubs, while the chipping sparrow seeks out dense hedges. Towhees and juncos nest among fallen leaves in sheltered sites. Baltimore orioles build their hanging, cradle-like nests in larger trees such as maples. In newer sub-divisions where large trees can be scarce, orioles often nest in fast-growing Lombardy poplars or in the top branches of white birches.

### THE RIGHT FOOD

As they do with habitats, birds show distinct preferences with food. Common redpoles, goldfinches and pine siskins eat the cones of alders and white birches. The European mountain ash with its bright orange berries attracts fall robins, cedar waxwings and several species of thrush. Cedar waxwings are also drawn to the berries of the autumn olive, a hardy, silver-leafed shrub that grows from 8 to 14 feet (2.5 to 4.25 metres tall). The berries ripen in clusters and remain throughout the winter. The nannyberry with its blue-black fruit, and the highbush cranberry with its scarlet berries, are useful food shrubs. When they are clipped densely, they also provide excellent nest sites.