



Landscaping for Birds

The most surefire way to attract birds to your backyard is to make certain the appropriate habitat is available to them. You may be lucky and already have a good supply of food, shelter, and water available for our feathered friends. In that case, you have to do little more than stand back and watch.

However, for most backyards, bird habitat must be created. It's called "landscaping for birds" and it can be as simple or extravagant as you wish. Whatever the approach, anyone who has ever tried this type of landscaping comes away with a real love for it after their first sparkling hummingbirds hover at the coral bells, or the perky catbird comes down for a drink of water from the birdbath, or the sleek waxwings gather en masse to sample bittersweet berries.

Benefits of Landscaping for Birds

You can derive many benefits from landscaping to attract birds to your yard:

Increased Wildlife Populations

You can probably double the number of bird species using your property with a good landscaping plan.

Energy Conservation

By carefully arranging your conifer and hardwood trees, you can lower winter heating and summer cooling bills for your house.

Soil Conservation

Certain landscape plants can prevent soil erosion.

Natural Beauty

A good landscaping plan contributes to a beautiful, natural setting around your home that is pleasing to people as well as birds.



Wildlife Photography

Wildlife photography is a wonderful hobby for people of all ages.

Birdwatching

Try keeping a list of all the birds you see in your yard or from your yard. Some people have counted nearly 200 species of birds in their yard!

Natural Insect Control

Birds such as tree swallows, house wrens, brown thrashers and orioles eat a variety of insects.

Food Production

Some plants that attract wildlife are also appealing to humans. People and wildlife can share cherries, chokecherries, strawberries, and crabapples.

Property Value

A good landscaping plan can greatly increase the value of your property by adding natural beauty and an abundance of wildlife.

Habitat for Kids

Some of the best wildlife habitats are the best habitats for young people to discover the wonders of nature. A backyard bird habitat can stimulate young people to develop a lifelong interest in wildlife and conservation.

Basics of Landscaping for Birds

Landscaping for birds involves nine basic principles:

Food

Every bird species has its own unique food requirements that may change as the seasons change. Learn the food habits of the birds you wish to attract. Then plant the appropriate trees, shrubs, and flowers to provide the fruits, berries, seeds, acorns, nuts and nectar.

Water

You may be able to double the number of bird species in your yard by providing a source of water. A frog pond, water garden, or bird bath will get lots of bird use, especially if the water is dripping, splashing or moving.

Shelter

Birds need places where they can hide from predators and escape from severe weather. Trees (including dead ones), shrubs, tall grass and bird houses provide excellent shelter.

Diversity

The best landscaping plan is one that includes a variety of native plants. This helps attract the most bird species.

Four Seasons

Give birds food and shelter throughout the year by planting a variety of trees, shrubs and flowers that provide year-round benefits.

Arrangement

Properly arrange the different habitat components in your yard. Consider the effects of prevailing winds (and snow drifting) so your yard will be protected from harsh winter weather.

Protection

Birds should be protected from unnecessary mortality. When choosing the placement of bird feeders and nest boxes, consider their accessibility to predators. Picture windows can also be dangerous for birds, who fly directly at windows when they see the reflection of trees and shrubs. A network of parallel, vertical strings spaced 4 inches apart can be placed on the outside of windows to prevent this problem. Be cautious about the kinds of herbicides and pesticides used in your yard. Apply them only when necessary and strictly according to label instructions. In fact, try gardening and lawn care without using pesticides. Details can be found in gardening books at the library.

Hardiness Zones

When considering plants not native to your area, consult a plant hardiness zone map, found in most garden catalogues. Make sure the plants you want are rated for the winter hardiness zone classification of your area.

Soils and Topography

Consult your local garden center, university or county extension office to have your soil tested. Plant species are often adapted to certain types of soils. If you know what type of soil you have, you can identify the types of plants that will grow best in your yard.