

Many gardeners are eager to invite birds into their gardens, and for good reason. Not only are birds fun to watch, they're also important to garden ecosystems. Since many of them love to eat insects, they can even provide natural pest control.

All kinds of spaces can become oases for a wide variety of birds. It doesn't matter whether your home is enclosed by dense trees, surrounded by open lawn, or three stories up in the middle of the city. With a little imagination, you can welcome feathered friends to any outdoor space.

A Bird's Eye View

Try imagining your garden from the perspective of the birds you want to invite. Birds are most attracted to spaces that not only meet their basic needs, but also mimic elements of their natural habitats. To a bird, a house surrounded by shrubs and vines may resemble a rocky outcrop, a fountain sounds like a babbling brook, and a patch of lawn between perennial beds is like a small opening in a thicket.

Here's a short list of general habitat features that will make your space more attractive to all kinds of birds, and other wildlife too.

- *Diversity:* In a healthy forest or meadow, plant species of all shapes and sizes thrive side by side. Mimicking this natural diversity is the key to welcoming all kinds of birds. In planning a diverse garden, consider height, shape, deciduous vs. evergreen leaves, bloom time, flower shape and color, and production of berries or seeds. The more variety you provide in the landscape, the greater diversity of birds you'll attract.
- *Edges and Transitions:* Many birds thrive in the transitional spaces between different kinds of habitats. A border of diverse shrubs between a forested area and a lawn is one example, but there are many other possibilities. See if you can augment existing edges in your landscape, or create some from scratch.
- *Northwest Natives:* Native plants provide the most reliable habitat for native birds, and you may be surprised by the variety and beauty they offer. Plants native to other regions can certainly have a place in a wildlife garden, but be sure to avoid invasive varieties.
- *Peace and quiet:* Especially if you live in a densely populated area or near noisy roads, provide your birds – and yourself – with a sheltered space away from the sights and sounds of human activity. Trellises, arbors, and well-placed trees and shrubs can help.
- *Wildness:* Birds prefer their habitats on the wild side. Leaf mulch harbors tasty insects, seed heads provide food, and brush piles make great hiding spots. Birds may be disturbed by frequent human activity such as raking and pruning in their favorite spots. Even if you prefer to keep some parts of your garden manicured, consider letting some out of the way patches go wild as refuges for birds.

Food for all Seasons

Birdfeeders are a great way to provide supplemental food, but it's best if most of your birds' food comes from the landscape itself. It's important to provide diverse sources of berries, seeds, and nectar, as well as plenty of habitat for insects to suit your birds' diverse diets. There are many beautiful landscape plants that provide food for birds. Here are just a few examples out of countless possibilities.

- *Berries* are attractive to many birds including waxwings, robins, and flickers. Great berry-producing plants include Indian plum, serviceberry, salal, nootka rose, cotoneaster, and crabapple.
- *Buds* are important in the early spring for many birds including finches and grosbeaks. Birch and alder both produce edible buds. Birds have been known to eat uncovered fruit tree buds as well, so be sure to cover any you'd rather not share.
- *Seeds* are a primary source of food for many birds, especially in the fall and winter. Popular landscape perennials that produce seeds for birds include Rudbeckia, Echinacea, salvia, blue flax, coreopsis, and yarrow.
- *Nectar* is essential for hummingbirds. Their favorite flowers tend to be tube-shaped and brightly colored. Take a look at our *Plants to Attract Hummingbirds* list for inspiration.

Under Cover

Many of the trees and shrubs that provide birds with food also provide long-term nesting sites and temporary protection from predators. Birds will prefer different kinds of shelter depending on their size and foraging behavior. For example, juncos, thrushes, and towhees prefer shrubs close to the ground, whereas flycatchers and pine siskins flit high up in evergreen trees. Provide a mix of evergreen and deciduous foliage, as well as different sizes and textures, to attract diverse birds.

Fresh Water

Gardeners often underestimate the importance of water in a wildlife garden. Birds need water not only to drink, but also to bathe in so they can keep their feathers healthy. While many birds are attracted to the sound of running water, any water source will do. If you keep a source of shallow still water such as a birdbath, make sure to refresh it regularly. This will keep your birdbath free of diseases that can be harmful to birds, as well as unwelcome algae and mosquito larvae.

Winter Bird Care

Winter is the hardest time of year for birds, and when they most appreciate help from gardeners. Provide food throughout the year, including both natural food sources and supplemental feeders. Unfrozen water is also more important in cold weather. You can use a small immersion heater to save yourself the trouble of chipping ice out of your bird baths. If you provide supplemental sugar water feeders for hummingbirds, you can bring them into the house on cold nights to make sure they remain unfrozen.