

**Notes from “Bird Friendly Gardening” Lecture – West End Horticultural Society  
May 18, 2022 – Presented by Sheldon Harvey, Bird Protection Quebec**

## **Plants For Birds –**

### **Starting with a message from Audubon**

#### **Native plants help support our birds throughout the year**

**Bring birds to your home today** by growing native plants. With [Audubon's Native Plant Database](#), you can find the best plants for the birds in your area. Growing bird-friendly plants will attract and protect the birds you love while making your space beautiful, easy to care for, and better for the environment. Explore all of sorts of native plant resources , including factsheets on [creating a native plant garden](#) and [how it can save you money](#). And, if you're attracting birds using native plants, you will want to ensure that your space is bird-friendly in every way. Visit the [Reducing Collisions](#) page to learn more about protecting birds from collisions with glass.

## **Why Native Plants Are Better for Birds and People –**

Bird-friendly landscaping provides food, saves water, and fights climate change.

**BETTER FOR BIRDS!**

**BETTER FOR PEOPLE!**

Your garden is your outdoor sanctuary. With some careful plant choices, it can be a haven for native birds as well. Landscaped with native species, your yard, patio, or balcony becomes a vital recharging station for birds passing through and a sanctuary for nesting and overwintering birds.

Each patch of restored native habitat is just that—a patch in the frayed fabric of the ecosystem in which it lies. By landscaping with native plants, we can turn a patchwork of green spaces into a quilt of restored habitat.

## **Better for Birds**

More native plants mean more choices of food and shelter for native birds and other wildlife

To survive, native birds need native plants and the insects that have co-evolved with them. Most landscaping plants available in nurseries are exotic species from other countries. Many are prized for qualities that make them poor food sources for native birds—like having leaves that are unpalatable to native insects and caterpillars. With 96 percent of all terrestrial bird species in North America feeding insects to their young, planting insect-proof exotic plants is like serving up plastic food. No insects? No birds.

Native oaks support more than 550 different species of butterflies and moths alone. The non-native ginkgo tree supports just 5

In a study of suburban properties in southeast Pennsylvania, for example, eight times more Wood Thrushes, Eastern Towhees, Veeries, and Scarlet Tanagers were found in yards with native plantings as compared with yards landscaped with typical alien ornamentals.

## Better for People

When you landscape with native species, you can spend more time with the birds and less time with the mower. How does that boost human health? During the growing season, some 56 million Americans mow 40 million acres of grass each week—an area eight times the size of New Jersey! Mowers and weed-whackers burn gasoline to the tune of 800 million gallons per year, contributing to the greenhouse gases that drive global warming

Spills happen. The EPA estimates that Americans spill more than 17 million gallons of fuel each year while refueling lawn equipment, polluting the air and groundwater. Older, less efficient two-cycle engines release significant amounts of their oil and gas unburned. The less lawn you mow, the less air and water pollution you create.

By planting native species, you will also:

- Save water
- Help to control flooding
- Use fewer chemicals
- Reduce maintenance
- Create beauty

## Attracting birds to your garden is easy

It doesn't matter if you live on a farm or in an apartment, in the country or in a city – anyone can attract birds to their property given a little (pleasurable) work and some ingenuity.

## 10 Secrets to Make Your Garden Bird Friendly

### #1. Start by thinking like a bird!

A Birder's Garden needs ...

- Food and water
- Shelter (from weather and predators)
- Nesting opportunities

### #2 -Use three levels of vegetation to blend great design with great bird habitat

**A mixed environment will please both birds and people.**

Incorporating plants at three levels – a mixed environment – will provide all of the above requirements to make it attractive to birds. At the same time, it will automatically incorporate the elements of good design needed to create an attractive garden.

### #3. Start with a base of low to the ground design elements

**As in life, it's ok to start at the bottom in the garden!**

The following ground-level staples of garden design serve several important functions.

- **Ground cover plants** – All birds need somewhere to skulk when life seems threatening and a place to find tasty food such as insects and seeds.
- **Logs and rocks** – Add rocks to provide a place to perch. Stack old firewood to simulate fallen trees. A pile of logs is essential in a wildlife garden.
- **Lawns** – Robins and Flickers rather like grass – so do Juncos and the odd Sparrow but most birds feel very exposed out there. Some grass is fine, but not too much and don't cut it shorter than necessary.

#### **#4. Add a mid-level layer of shrubs and bushes**

**Shrubs provide beauty as well as food and shelter for the birds.**

Not just beautiful to look at, they also provide your feathered garden visitors a perch to look about from and shelter from inclement weather. Use plant species that start the year covered in flowers and end it with a crop of berries that provide food.

#### **#5. Look up – way up... add height with trees**

**Trees add beauty to please the gardener and offer built-in features that will make the birds happy too!**

Even small young trees will make your garden more attractive to birds and over the years will mature into something of beauty. So go out and plant some trees this season! Trees provide places to nest, to eat, sing and be seen. Different species build nests at different heights, so a nicely wooded lot will make your garden appealing to a variety of birds.

#### **#6. Give yourself a break and don't be too tidy!**

**Birds love a messy garden and nothing says "welcome" like an old log. Really....scruffy corners are highly desirable!**

Birds do not usually like "tidy" gardens so leave piles of leaves and twigs, especially during the winter. In woodlands, fallen wood occurs naturally and many species have adapted to use this habitat. The nooks and crannies of old logs shelter insects and in turn attract foraging birds. Plenty of wildlife makes its home in dead wood, and use it as a source of food. You can usually find somewhere to put a pile of old logs or firewood, even in the smallest backyard. Place your old logs in a shady spot, so that it remains cool and damp. Leave a corner unraked in the fall to promote insect life and shelter for small rodents. Do not cut the heads of seed-bearing flowers before winter. Birds will feed on these seeds during the winter months.

#### **#7. Don't forget the importance of shelter. Birds need to feel safe!**

Birds won't visit if they don't feel safe! Add some sheltering elements though, and you'll have them singing your praises from the tree-tops soon enough!

Remember, wide-open spaces may look fine to a gardener and mirror the designs in the glossy magazines, but they terrify birds. They know that there are lots of things out there, from cats to birds of prey, just itching to eat them! Shelter comes in many forms, be it a low level hedge, a pile of brush, an old tree stump or a majestic oak tree. If it can provide a place to perch or to hide, it will be a welcome haven for your feathered visitors.

#### **#8. Provide birds with a choice of feeder and food types**

**We all need choices – even the birds!**

Different species like different ways to have their food presented so offer a variety of feeder and seed types. Wrong seed types = no birds. Include tray or ground feeders, hopper feeders and tube feeders for large and small seeds

#### **#9. Provide a range of wild or natural foods**

**Variety is the spice of life ... and another secret to a great bird garden!**

Your plants don't just have to attract birds directly; they can also attract creatures birds like to eat. Insects, worms, larvae, eggs, rodents and other birds are all potential food sources that will attract birds to your garden. Add plants that provide seeds, berries, nectar, fruit, nuts and buds for abundant variety.

## #10. Just add water – the key ingredient in any birder’s garden

**A water feature is a sure-fire way to attract birds to your yard.**

Nothing else that you place in your garden will have such an effect on the number of species you see as will a puddle of water. Be it rain filling that little dip in your lawn to an elaborate pond, water is a bird magnet.

Moving water is a must-have feature to increase the range of species you are likely to see in your garden. No room for a pond? In a small garden or on an apartment balcony a container of water such as an inverted garbage can lid or a bucket will draw birds to it, especially if they can access the water by perching on the rim or on stones or twigs placed inside of it. Even just a dripping tap, or a slow trickle from the end of a hose can increase your bird “catch rate” tenfold.

Bird baths are readily available at a price point to please everyone. Easy to acquire and set-up, purchasing a bird bath adds instant beauty and bird-appeal to your yard. If you only choose to do one thing to attract more birds, a bird bath may be the easiest option.

## Types of Trees, Vines, and Shrubs to Plant for Birds: A Starter List

### Deciduous trees

#### **Mulberries (*Morus* species)**

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, waxwings, cardinals, numerous other songbirds
- Also provides: Nest sites

#### **Serviceberries (*Amelanchier* species)**

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, waxwings, cardinals, vireos, tanagers, grosbeaks, others
- Also provides: Nest sites

#### **Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*)**

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, tanagers, grosbeaks, many others
- Also provides: Nest sites

#### **Crabapples (*Malus* species)**

- Food type: Flower buds, flowers, fruit, seeds
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, waxwings, Pine Grosbeaks, finches, many others
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

#### **White oak (*Quercus alba*)**

- Food type: Acorns
- Attracts: Woodpeckers, jays, Wild Turkeys, grouse, Wood Ducks, others
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

### Coniferous Trees

#### **Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)**

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Waxwings and others
- Also provides: Excellent nest sites and cover

#### **Spruces (*Picea* species)**

- Food type: Seed-bearing cones. Its evergreen needles are a good source of insects in early spring.
- Attracts: Crossbills and other seed-eaters in fall and winter. Migrating warblers search for insects in spring.
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

## Vines

### Wild grape (*Vitis* species)

- Food type: Fruit Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, orioles, Wild Turkey, Pileated Woodpecker, mockingbirds, thrashers, many others.
- Also provides: Excellent nest sites, nest material (shredding bark), cover

### Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, starlings, Wild Turkey, vireos, warblers, Pileated Woodpecker, many others
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

## Shrubs

### Northern bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Tree Swallows (especially wintering), catbirds, bluebirds, many others.
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

### Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

- Food type: Fruit, seeds
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, chickadees, starlings, Wild Turkey, Pileated Woodpecker, many others

### Red-osier dogwood, gray dogwood, and others (*Cornus* species)

- Deciduous shrub
- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, vireos, kingbirds, juncos, cardinals, warblers, Wild Turkey, grouse, others
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

### Nannyberry, arrowwood (*Viburnum* species)

- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, finches, waxwings, others
- Also provides: Nest sites, cover

### Winterberry (holly) (*Ilex verticillata*)

- Deciduous shrub
- Food type: Fruit
- Attracts: Robins, bluebirds, waxwings, others.
- Also provides: Cover

## Twelve Ways to Design a Bird-friendly Garden

1. Re-create the layers of plant growth found in local natural areas.
2. Select plants with an eye to providing nutritional foods during different seasons.
3. Plant small trees and shrubs in same-species clumps.
4. Provide at least one clump of conifers.
5. Spare a dead tree (snag) for the birds.
6. Leave vines or plant them.
7. Limit the size of your lawn.
8. Avoid invasive non-native plants.
9. Supply a source of water.

10. Provide nest boxes.
11. Leave some leaf litter for the birds.
12. Use pesticides sparingly, if at all.

## How to Make Your Yard Bird-Friendly

Grow a beautiful garden that provides a safe haven for birds in the face of climate change. Birds are nature's messengers, and they're broadcasting loud and clear: They are already experiencing the [devastating impacts of climate change](#) and habitat loss, and these dangers will only grow over time. In the face of these threats, you can help birds thrive right where you live by making your yard more bird-friendly. Follow the steps below to create a patch of vibrant habitat that attracts colorful birds and their sweet melodies. If you don't have a yard, you can still help birds by [creating a native plant container garden](#) on your patio or balcony. Even very small patches of habitat provide tired, hungry birds with exactly what they need, particularly during migration. The secret to success lies in choosing locally native plants, which brim with nutritious insects, berries, nectar, and seeds and give birds vital refuge.

## Choose Native Plants

Focus on native plants that provide a good variety of bird food throughout the year for nesting, migrating, and wintering

**Bugs:** Native trees such as oaks, willows, birches, and maples, and native herbaceous plants such as goldenrod, milkweed, and sunflowers host many caterpillar species that are a vital source of protein for birds, especially during the breeding season.

**Fruit:** Many shrubs and small trees provide berries that ripen at different times, so include seasonal variety: serviceberry and cherry for birds during the breeding season and summer; dogwood and spicebush for songbirds flying south; cedar and holly trees to sustain birds through cold winter days and nights.

**Nuts and seeds:** Trees such as oaks, hickories, and walnuts provide fat and protein rich food that birds hide, or "cache," to provide food through the cold winter. Native sunflowers, asters, and coneflowers produce loads of tiny seeds that are finch and sparrow favorites.

**Nectar:** Red tubular flowers such as native columbine, penstemon, and honeysuckle serve up nectar for hummingbirds. Flowers in the aster family, such as coneflowers, asters, and Joe-Pye Weed are very attractive to insect pollinators like butterflies, moths, and bees, in addition to providing seeds for birds.

## Plan Your Bird Habitat

Think of your garden as a habitat that *you* are creating to provide birds with food, shelter, and nesting sites throughout the year.

**Take stock of the plants you already have:** Your yard may already include native plants that birds love.

**Know the basics about your space:**

*Sun or shade?*

*Wet or dry?*

*What's your soil like?*

**Map it out & Create "habitat layers":**

*Large canopy trees* provide many resources including nuts, nest cavities, and other roosting spots

*Shrubs and small trees* often provide fruit, as well as nesting sites for songbirds

*Herbaceous plants*, including perennials, annuals, and groundcovers, provide seeds for birds and a rich habitat for pollinators

*Decaying leaves, wood, detritus, and soil* form the base of your habitat, and a home for many invertebrates that birds eat, including the pupae of most *moth caterpillars*—a favorite of baby birds

- **Cluster plants in masses:** Group 5 or more of the same plant species together. This creates an attractive look and is also favored by pollinators, which prefer to feed from a mass of the same flower species.
- **Think about height:** Place taller plants towards the back of your borders, with lower-growing species at the edges of paths or lawn.
- **Design for color palettes** and continuous blooming throughout the gardening season.
- **Leave some room:** Pay attention to each species' stated dimensions when full grown, so plants aren't too crowded together.
- **Remember the water:** Water is an often overlooked resource that birds need year round. Include hollowed boulders that catch rainwater or a man-made bird bath for birds to drink and bathe in. Consider a drip bath or fountain feature; the sound of running water is particularly attractive to birds and may bring them flocking during migration.

## Caring for Your Garden

Steward your native plant habitat with tender loving care—but don't be too neat.

**Weed:** Remove non-native and invasive weeds. Weeding is often maligned as a "chore"... but it's also a great excuse to spend time in your garden and get to know its wildlife.

**Don't rake:** Fallen leaves and woody debris are an important habitat layer, and serve as a natural mulch. They will reduce unwanted weed growth, keep your plants' roots cool and moist—and provide habitat for insects and the pupae of moth caterpillars, a favorite of baby birds.

**Leave the seeds:** Don't "dead-head" all of your flowering plants after they bloom, as those seedheads can be an important source of food during the fall and winter.

**Spare your back:** In forested areas, leave dead trees and branches. Fallen trunks and branches support the entire forest food web as they decay into rich soil. Standing tree trunks may provide homes for many cavity-nesting species: Woodpeckers often create or enlarge the cavities, but many species will nest in them, including chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Great-crested Flycatchers, Wood Ducks, and American Kestrels.

**Build a brush pile:** Enhance your garden area by creating a brush pile to provide shelter for birds and other wildlife.

## How To Encourage A Messy Garden

- Leave your leaves on the property
- Allow the gorgeous dried flower heads to stay standing in your garden
- Let the grass grow tall and seed
- Build a brush pile with fallen branches instead of removing them
- Forget the chemicals
- Leave snags on your property
- Delay garden clean-up until spring, after several 50°F (10°C) days, which allows overwintering pollinators to "wake-up" for spring and move on

## Late Fall heading into Winter

Have you ever taken a moment to see beyond the *brown, dried, shriveled flowers* and admired the sturdy fragility of a winter garden? This splendor is especially noticeable after the first frost (in areas that experience frost) as the stems and flowerheads are covered in a thin layer of frozen dew. Stunning! For those that experience regional snowfall, did you know some people actually garden to ensure a pleasing *winter garden* view? This often entails selecting plants with colorful and structurally resilient stems and seed heads built to stand-up to snowfall. Arching branches of native shrubs displaying frosty fruits, seedheads shooting up from the icy white blanket reminding birds where to land for sustenance, and the vibrant stems of some of our favorite natives assure us that the warm colors of spring and summer will return.

## Some Websites to Help Create a Bird Friendly Garden

[Plants Map](#)

[The Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Best Plants and Trees for Birds](#)

[Audubon: Turn Your Yard Into a Winter Refueling Spot for Birds](#)

[Brooklyn Botanic Garden: 12 Ways to Design a Bird-Friendly Garden](#)

[Welcome Wildlife – Create a Backyard Wildlife Habitat](#)



### Information on Bird Protection Quebec

E-mail: [birdprotectionquebec@gmail.com](mailto:birdprotectionquebec@gmail.com)

Webpage: [www.birdprotectionquebec.org](http://www.birdprotectionquebec.org)  
(currently being redesigned)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/birdprotectionquebec>

Bird Protection Quebec has weekly field trips, to a different location each week. The field trips are open to members and non-members alike. There is no charge to participate. You do not need to reserve a spot, or confirm your attendance. All you need do is to show up at the designated rendezvous point at the designated time. The trips are usually on Saturday mornings, with some exceptions.

The best way to get weekly information on upcoming trips is to either go to our Facebook page (link above) and look for “Events”, or an easier method is to subscribe to our weekly BPQ E-News which is sent out several days before each outing directly to your e-mail address. You can subscribe on the following page: <https://pqspb.org/bpqpoq/in-touch/subscribe-to-newsletters/>