

Providing Habitat For Birds

Without question, songbirds are one of the most popular groups of all backyard wildlife. The best way to attract birds is simply to “supply what is most desired when it is most required”—nesting sites in spring, water in summer, food and shelter in winter.

Spring Gardens

The breeding season for songbirds starts in spring. However, songbirds fine tune their breeding cycle to coincide with the most favorable weather and abundant food resources. Since natural foods begin to become available as spring progresses, you may wish to slowly phase out your feeding stations even though a few resident birds may still be regular guests. Be careful not to stop feeding too early before insects become readily available.



Spring is the time to provide nest boxes for cavity nesting birds, plant shrubs and other vegetation for non-cavity nesters, and offer nesting materials like yarn and string. Seed and fruit producing plants sown or planted in spring will reap benefits to be enjoyed later in the year.

Summer Gardens

Because summer is a dry season, water can become a limiting factor to the survival of wildlife. A carefully planned water source or a variety of water sources can attract summer birds. Another need is a quiet, secluded and protected place where young birds can be reared. Shrubby and unmowed grassy areas are good places for young birds to learn about their surroundings in relative safety while their parents continue to feed and care for them.

Autumn Gardens

Autumn is the time to winterize your garden and prepare for winter needs. Prepare or build your winter bird feeders, and add additional cover to brush piles and protection around feeders. Improve shelter and wind break effectiveness of hedges and fencerows. Clean out nest boxes so they can be used as winter roost sites. Leave seed crops, such as grains and old field vegetation, unmowed. Birds will benefit from the seeds and cover provided.

Winter Gardens

Winter can be a critical time of year for wildlife. Fortunately, we can provide important habitat elements to help songbirds through the winter by feeding, providing cover, and maintaining an unfrozen water source. One feeder supplied with sunflower seeds, a second with a mix of millet or other small grains and a couple of suet feeders should cater to the majority of birds found around your home.

The presence of cover to provide shelter from winds, for refuge, and for roosting is also important. Evergreens and shrub thickets provide good winter cover. Lastly, it is necessary to provide clean, fresh, unfrozen water in bird baths, shallow containers on the ground, or small backyard ponds.

Native Plants for Nesting

You can attract a greater variety of birds to nest on your property if you provide a diversity of nesting situations to suit their specific requirements, such as clumps of shrubbery, tangled thickets and tall trees. The plants listed below are preferred by many birds for nesting. Some of these plants also provide food and shelter for birds. For best nesting success, plant them in masses or clumps, preferably in quiet areas of the yard.

Fir (*Abies balsamea* – Balsam fir)

Tanagers, grosbeaks, robins and jays are among the many birds that nest in balsam fir. Balsam fir is hard to grow at mid to low elevations.

Hackberry (*Celtis spp.*)

Many birds nest in the state's 3 native hackberry species, including indigo buntings and hummingbirds.

Dogwood (*Cornus spp.*)

Summer tanagers are attracted to nest in the 7 out of 8 native dogwoods species the Mountain State has to offer.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus spp.*)

The thorny branches of hawthorns provide abundant nesting sites for smaller birds, including hummingbirds, cardinals, indigo buntings and wood thrushes.

Holly (*Ilex spp.*)

Dense, prickly holly foliage attracts towhees, thrashers and mockingbirds.

Juniper (*Juniperus virginiana* – Red cedar)

Junipers are very valuable nesting plants. Chipping sparrows, robins, song sparrows and mockingbirds are among the many species that nest in this native tree.

Spruce (*Picea rubens*- Red Spruce)

Kinglets and many warblers nest in the evergreen foliage of the native red spruce. This tree grows best in cooler locales.

Pine (*Pinus spp.*)

Robins, purple finches and mourning doves are among the many birds that nest in pines.

Oak (*Quercus spp.*)

Oaks are outstanding trees for nesting. Blue-gray gnatcatchers, orchard orioles, summer tanagers and blue jays are among the many species that nest in oaks.

Rose (*Rosa spp.*)

The dense, prickly stems of native roses provide excellent nesting sites for smaller birds, including indigo buntings, cardinals, yellow warblers, towhees and sparrows. Five of the eight species found in WV are native to the state. However, avoid multiflora rose because it is aggressively invasive and will crowd out other plants!

Blackberry and Raspberry (*Rubus spp.*)

The spiny stems of these brambles provide secure nesting sites for indigo



buntings, cardinals, yellow warblers, tow-hees and sparrows.

Elderberry (*Sambucus spp.*)

Warblers, grosbeaks and goldfinches nest in the foliage.

Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis* – Hemlock)

Hemlocks are outstanding nesting plants. Many species of warblers, as well as robins, juncos, veerys, American goldfinches and blue jays, are among the birds that nest in hemlocks.

Trees and Shrubs for Shade and Shelter

These native trees and shrubs have dense foliage, providing shade and shelter for birds. Some also provide food and nesting sites.

Fir (*Abies balsamea* – Balsam fir)

The evergreen foliage of firs is valuable to a wide variety of birds for shelter and roosting.

Alder (*Alnus spp.*)

Alders are good shelter trees for many birds, including blue jays and woodcocks (at higher elevations).

Holly (*Ilex spp.*)

The dense, prickly foliage of hollies provides good protective shelter.

Juniper (*Juniperus virginiana* – Red cedar)

Important food trees, junipers also provide valuable shelter. Juncos, sparrows and yellow-rumped warblers are among the birds that frequently roost in the foliage.

Mulberry (*Morus rubra* – Red mulberry)

Mulberries are useful for shelter and cover, as well as being outstanding food trees and providing secure nesting sites.

Spruce (*Picea rubens* – Red spruce)

Spruces provide excellent year-round nesting and roosting sites, as well as shelter for birds. They grow best in cool places.

Pine (*Pinus spp.*)

Excellent shelter for many birds, larger pines are favored roosting sites for migrating robins, warblers and waxwings.

Oak (*Quercus spp.*)

Oaks provide food, shelter and nesting sites for many birds.

Rhododendron /Azalea (*Rhododendron spp.*)

Rhododendrons and azaleas provide valuable shelter when planted in thickets.

Sumac (*Rhus spp.*)

Sumacs provide good summer shelter and winter forage.

Rose (*Rosa spp.*)

Thorny native (5 out of 8 species found in WV) rose thickets provide excellent shelter and protective cover for many birds.

Blackberry and Raspberry (*Rubus spp.*)

Prickly bramble shrubs provide shelter for towhees, native sparrows, warblers, thrushes and buntings.

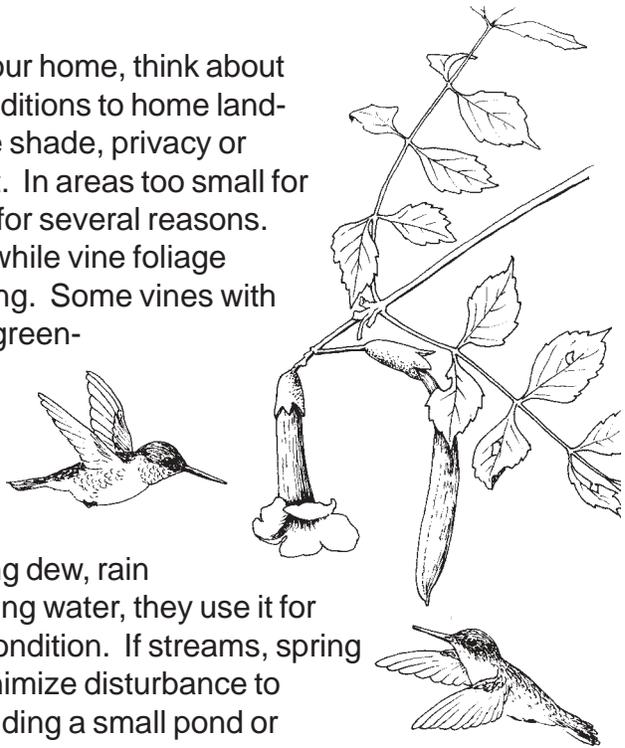
Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis* – Hemlock)

Outstanding nesting trees, hemlocks also provide excellent shelter. Chickadees, titmice, juncos and cardinals are among the birds that shelter in the evergreen hemlock foliage.

--Information from: Adams, G. 1994. *Birdscaping Your Garden*. Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA

Vines

If you're looking for ways to attract birds to your home, think about planting vines. Vines are attractive and useful additions to home landscapes. Use vines for ground cover or to provide shade, privacy or protection from wind, dust, glare or reflected heat. In areas too small for shrubs, vines are perfect plants. Birds like vines for several reasons. Vine seeds and fruits are good sources of food, while vine foliage provides an ideal site for nesting and raising young. Some vines with high food and cover value to wildlife are grapes, green-brier, trumpet-creeper and Virginia creeper.



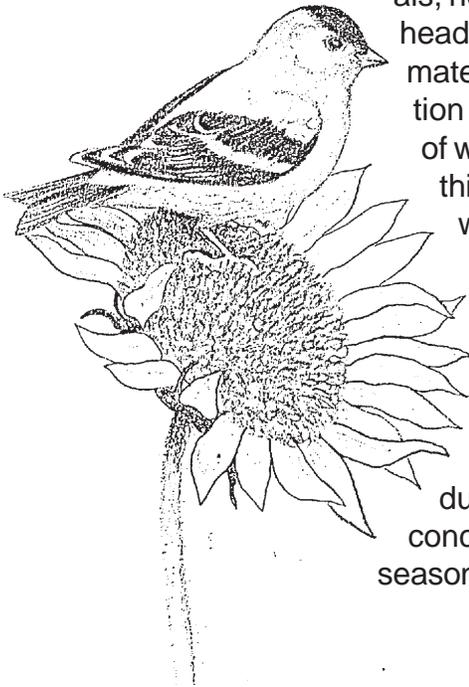
Water Sources

Songbirds obtain water from a number of sources including the food they eat, snow, morning dew, rain puddles, ponds and streams. In addition to drinking water, they use it for bathing, a necessity for keeping feathers in top condition. If streams, spring seeps or ponds are present on your property, minimize disturbance to these areas. If water is not present, consider building a small pond or putting out bird baths.

Bird baths should be kept shallow with gently sloping sides and a non-skid surface and placed close to shrubbery. During periods of hot weather and heavy use, a regular hosing and occasional scrubbing are important in maintaining clean bath water; this practice may be required on a daily basis.

Using Wildflowers

Wildflowers are among the most important wildlife food sources because they are widespread and produce an abundant supply of seeds. They are also of value for nesting materials, nesting cover and protective cover. Those with silky seed heads or other conspicuous plant down may furnish nest-lining material. Plants with dense branching or thorns offer good protection for nesting and wintering birds. Provide a variety of species of wildflowers as well as variety of plant types, such as tall, short, thin leaves, wide leaves, etc. Generally a greater variety of wildflowers will attract a greater variety of songbirds.



Pesticides & Herbicides

During the nesting season (April-July) almost all songbirds, no matter what their diet is at other times of the year, feed their young caterpillars and other insects. Therefore, pesticides that kill insects should be used sparingly, if at all, during this time of year. Herbicides might kill plants that are concealing nests and should also be avoided during the nesting season.