

Attracting Birds

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Many people enjoy watching birds, though if you grow grapes you may not appreciate their company. There are a number of things that you can do to encourage birds to inhabit your yard. Most people know about putting out a bird feeder and birdbath but there are also a number of plants which can be added to your landscape to provide both food and shelter.

For those interested in using a bird feeder, the most popular grains (at least as far as the birds are concerned) are striped, oil and hulled sunflower seeds, finely cracked corn, white proso millet, and thistle (niger) seed. If you buy commercial seed mixes you will most likely have a lot of waste because the birds will pick out the grains they like - throwing the rest on the ground. The seeds then germinate causing you even more work. By using separate feeders for the different types of grain you will not only cut down on waste but also competition at the feeders.

To enjoy a bird feeder be sure to place it in a spot that is easily visible from your house. To protect the birds from stray cats place the bird feeder 10 to 20 feet from thick shrub or tree cover. Some other items to keep in mind include; providing enough food for two to three days; protecting the food from rain - wet grain molds quickly which is unhealthy for birds; and maintaining the feeder throughout the year. Birds also require water for both drinking and bathing. If you can provide clean water about three feet off the ground and approximately 15 feet from shrubbery you will attract a lot of birds. When choosing a birdbath look for one which has a gradual slope to a depth of two to three inches. Do not fill the birdbath to the rim because the birds need a dry edge to perch on. Most commercial birdbaths don't attract birds because the sides are too steep. If you already have a commercial birdbath you may want to add some sand or pebbles to create a gentle incline and provide traction. Birds will not use a birdbath if the bottom is too smooth because they need a rough bottom to provide safe footholds. The sound of moving water is especially attractive to birds. Many stores and catalogs offer complete kits for birdbath fountains. A simpler method is to punch a hole in the side (not the bottom) of a bucket and hang it above the birdbath. Cover the bucket to keep out debris and prevent evaporation. Make the hole small enough so that only 10 to 20 drops will fall, per minute, into the birdbath. Another way to create moving water is by creating a thin jet or mist of water that shoots vertically into overhanging branches and then drips back into the bath. Birds are most active from sunrise to 10 AM and again from the late afternoon to early evening. To reduce your costs and wasted water use a timer to operate the mister. You can install a timer to the hose outlet that will activate the mister during those times when the birds are most active. The water in the birdbath should be kept clean and available on a consistent basis. A scrubbing every few days will rid the birdbath surface of algae, which thrives in bird fertilized water. Providing feeders and water will attract birds to your yard but to make the birds a permanent part of your yard you may need to increase the plant diversity in your landscape so that it provides both food and cover (habitat.) Here is a list of some native plants that will attract birds to your yard.

TREES: (dry, average (avg), moist, wet and varies refers to the moisture required by the plant.

* Salt tolerant)

Bumelia tenax (Tough bumelia*) dry; Carpinus caroliniana (Blue hornbeam or ironwood) avg; Crataegus spp. (Hawthorn) varies; Celtis laevigata (Sugarberry) moist; Chionanthus virginicus (Fringe tree) avg; Diospyros virginiana (Persimmon) avg; Fraxinus pennsylvanica (Green ash) moist; Ilex cassine (Dahoon holly) moist; Ilex opaca (American holly) avg; Ilex vomitoria (Yaupon) avg; Juniperus silicicola (Southern red cedar*) avg; Magnolia grandiflora (Southern magnolia) avg; Magnolia virginiana (Sweet bay) moist; Morus rubra (Red mulberry) avg [fruits can stain cement]; Myrcianthes fragrans (Simpson stopper) avg; Nyssa aquatica (Water tupelo) wet; Nyssa sylvatica biflora (Black gum or Tupelo) moist; Persea borbonia (Red bay) moist; Pinus clausa (Sand pine) dry; Pinus elliottii (Slash pine) moist; Pinus glabra (Spruce pine) moist; Pinus palustris (Longleaf pine) avg; Pinus serotina (Pond pine) wet [adapted to high & fluctuating water tables.]; Prunus caroliniana (Cherry laurel) avg; Prunus serotina (Black cherry) avg [foliage is poisonous to livestock]; Quercus laevis (Turkey oak) dry [thrives in very poor soil]; Quercus virginiana (Live oak) avg; Sabal palmetto (Cabbage palm) avg; Ulmus alata (Winged elm) avg.

SHRUBS:

Callicarpa americana (Beautyberry) avg; Coccoloba uvifera (Seagrape*) avg; Eugenia spp. (Stoppers) avg; Forestiera segregate (Florida privet) avg; Lycium carolinianum (Christmas berry*) avg; Myrica cerifera (Wax myrtle*) avg; Rhus copallina (Winged sumac) avg; Rubus cuneifolius (Sand blackberry) avg; Sambucus canadensis (Elderberry) moist; Viburnum obovatum (Walter's viburnum) moist.