



# LANDSCAPE PLANTS THAT ATTRACT BIRDS

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L A N D S C A P E P L A N T S

**I**nterest in songbirds grows every year. Bird feeding is perhaps the most popular wildlife-related activity in the country. Most of us enjoy seeing and hearing birds, and birdwatching is a fascinating year-round hobby for many people. A 1980 report on nonconsumptive uses of wildlife conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service revealed that 33 percent of Americans—about 56 million people—took special interest in wildlife near their homes. About 6 percent maintained natural areas for wildlife and 7.3 percent—about 12.5 million—maintained plantings for wildlife, the subject of this bulletin. In all cases, people were primarily interested in songbirds.

The bright flashes of color, the distinctive songs, the life birds add to the landscape, and the opportunity you have to observe their interesting habits make spending time and effort to encourage their presence well worth while.

If you give some thought to landscape planning and planting your home grounds, you can greatly increase the chance that birds will nest in your yard. A delightful thing about birds is the seemingly capricious way they select homesites. You can never predict exactly where a bird will build its nest, so it's a pleasure when they choose your yard.

About 330 species of birds migrate through or stay in Wisconsin. Of these, 12 or 15 songbird species commonly nest in residential areas of cities and towns, and 16 or 17 more build nests around rural homesites,

Besides these nesting birds, some migrant birds may stop for a day or two during their migration if they find your yard attractive. Don't forget about birds that stay over the winter. They add life and color to an otherwise

bleak and snowy scene. Landscape plants can help attract birds throughout the year. Winter bird feeders also enhance your yard's attractiveness.

Landscape plantings make home grounds attractive to birds in several ways. Plants furnish year-round shelter and protection from predators. They provide safe nesting sites and rearing places for young birds. And, they supply food in the form of fruit, seeds, and nectar. Birds also find plantings convenient and attractive places to hunt for insects. Landscape plantings can benefit birds and still follow basic principles of landscape design. Other benefits include fall foliage color, spring flowers, privacy, and edible fruits and nuts.

## LIVING REQUIREMENTS

Different birds require different habitats. For example, the flicker, northern (Baltimore) oriole, and chipping sparrow need just a few large trees to make an area suitable for them. Some, like the red-eyed vireo, wood thrush, and wood pewee need a dense stand of many large trees. Others, like the catbird, are satisfied with shrubs alone.

A few birds demand open spaces without trees and little or no shrubby vegetation. The house wren, tree swallow, robin, phoebe, and others nest in holes or cavities in trees, in nest boxes, or on platforms put up for them. By creating the proper habitat, you can make virtually any yard or garden attractive to some kind of songbird. Generally, the larger and more diverse your yard, the more birds and more different birds you will attract.

## V I B U                      R N U M



*spring*



*late summer*



*autumn*



*winter*

## WISCONSIN BIRDS

Based on bird counts from several Wisconsin cities, the following table shows the 15 most abundant breeding songbirds and their habitat and nesting preferences. Your location in Wisconsin, of course, influences the presence of some of these species.

House sparrows and starlings are almost always present: these two immigrants generally need no encouragement. In fact, try to discourage their presence to prevent their competing with more desirable native species. Grackles and crows are frequently attracted to large evergreens and also aren't always welcome.

The purple martin, screech owl, and chimney swift are often present, but they need special nesting sites. See publication "G2091, Shelves, Houses and Feeders for Birds and Squirrels" for more information.

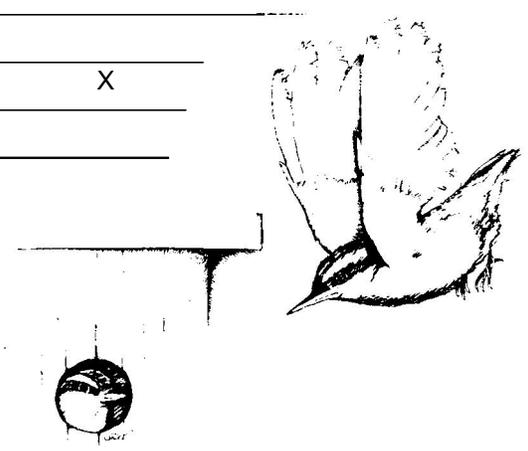
Hummingbirds have special needs. The ruby-throated hummingbird is the only one that lives in Wisconsin.

These tiny, iridescent, incredibly fast birds are a favorite with backyard wildlife enthusiasts. There are two ways to attract them. Hummingbird feeders filled with an instant "nectar" mix or a sugar-water solution (4 parts water to 1 part sugar) attract them. So too, do a wide variety of orange, yellow and especially red, tubular flowers that hummingbirds favor. Flowers such as scarlet petunia, bee balm, scarlet salvia, scarlet runner beans, cardinal flower, and scarlet morning glory may be incorporated into flower beds. Shrubs such as trumpet honeysuckle, weigela, or trumpet creeper vine also attract these birds. Other plants are available and many seed catalogs and nurseries note the relative attractiveness of their plants to hummingbirds.

Rural and suburban dwellers might expect to attract any of the above mentioned birds if suitable habitat is available in their gardens or on their grounds. In addition, the following birds might be expected in the less populous areas.

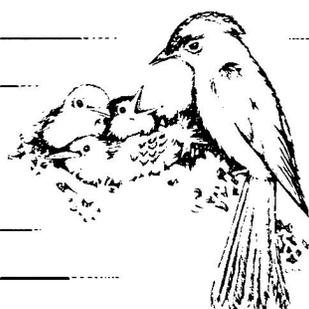
GENERAL HABITAT & NESTING PREFERENCE – Most Abundant Species

Species	Dense Trees	Few Trees	Shrubs	Nest Box	Nest Platform
Robin		X	X		X
Grackle		X			
House wren			X	X	
Mourning dove		X	X		
Blue jay	X	X	X		
Catbird		X	X		
Northern oriole		X			
Chipping sparrow		X			
Flicker	X	X		X	
Cardinal		X	X		
Rose-breasted grosbeak	X	X			
Goldfinch			X		
Cedar waxwing		X			
White-breasted nuthatch	X	X			
Scarlet tanager	X				



GENERAL HABITAT AND NESTING PREFERENCE – Less Common Species

Species	Dense Trees	Few Trees	Shrubs	Open	Nest Box	Nest Platform
Tree swallow				X	X	
Bluebird				X	X	
Warbling vireo		X				
Red-eyed vireo	X					
Brown thrasher		X	X			
Yellow warbler			X	X		
Indigo bunting			X	X		
Wood pewee	X					
Song sparrow			X	X		
Downy woodpecker	X	X				
Crested flycatcher	X				X	
Black-capped chickadee	X				X	
Wood thrush	X					
Phoebe		X				X
Yellow-billed cuckoo	X	X				
Red-headed woodpecker	X	X				



Neither list includes all possible species-only the most probable ones. One pleasant aspect of wildlife is the uncertainty about which species choose your yard. Be on the lookout for unusual species that visit your backyard.

## LANDSCAPING IDEAS

In selecting trees, shrubs or vines, consider their general landscape value as well as the value for birds. You can meet both goals by selecting plants with good foliage, attractive flowers, fruits, interesting branches and twigs, and a generally neat appearance. For example, redosier dogwood in conjunction with evergreens makes an attractive winter scene.

You may want to enclose your backyard for privacy. To be interesting, the enclosure should vary somewhat in

shape. Wider-planted areas can furnish the dense thickets some birds desire. The growth form and mature size of trees and shrubs are important considerations. Don't overcrowd your plantings.

Use low-branching shrubs next to the lawn, giving good transition from the grass to the shrub border. These low-branching shrubs also help protect ground-nesting birds.

A foundation planting of shrubs relates better to a house if there is a definite center of interest in line with a window. A bird bath may provide this focal point. Keep it filled to provide water for birds. Place it in a recessed area in the shrubbery where you can see it easily from the house, but not so close to the shrubs that cats can hide in them and stalk the birds. Also keep in mind the potential location of winter feeders when planning your planting.

Remember that your surroundings are as important as your yard. For example, a yard that adjoins a large wooded park or undeveloped land and a yard in the middle of a new subdivision have very different potentials. In the first case you may want to make your yard compatible with surrounding habitat while in the second case you may start from scratch to create the habitat you choose.

## PLANTS FOR BIRDS

You may select from many plant varieties for your home grounds. Every landscape planting needs at least a few conifers (evergreens) if it is to have maximum value for songbirds. Spruce, arborvitae (white cedar), junipers, yew, pines, and firs provide excellent nesting cover and winter shelter. Conifers also make excellent windbreaks for birdfeeders during winter.

The different serviceberries or juneberries make attractive small trees or shrubs. They bear abundant edible fruit in early summer and many berry-eating birds like them.

Most dogwoods adapt well to home grounds, and many bird species eat their fruits. The gray dogwood is an excellent shrub for home grounds planting and bears an abundant crop of white fruits. The redosier dogwood, which likes moist soil, is a good background plant for a pool. It has bright red twigs in winter, and its white fruit catches the eye of birds.

Many people rank hawthorns or thornapples as the best small trees for landscaping with one-story houses. Some variety's fruits drop in early fall, but those of the cockspur hawthorn and Washington hawthorn are retained all winter long. These trees provide excellent nesting cover for many songbirds and, because of their thorny stems, are quite cat-proof.

The American elder or common elderberry is a large shrub which bears fruit very heavily. The plant may be a bit coarse-textured for some home landscapes, but is a good shrub for large plantings. It has large, flat, attractive clusters of white flowers in spring, followed by purple to black fruit in late summer. Yellow warblers and goldfinches frequently nest in these shrubs.

Although they are attractive to birds, some trees and shrubs tend to become weedy and invasive. Tartarian honeysuckle, multiflora rose, buckthorn and autumnolive should be closely controlled. Mulberry is very attractive to birds like robins but the ripe fruits, messy purplish bird droppings, and weedy nature generally make it a tree to avoid.

For late fall and winter food, the American cranberrybush viburnum and the nannyberry viburnum may be useful. Both are excellent large shrubs for landscape plantings. The American cranberrybush has beautiful translucent red fruits, that grosbeaks and cedar waxwings especially like, and nannyberry has quite large bluish fruits. Either shrub often attracts cardinals if there are any in the area. Cranberrybush viburnum berries usually remain untouched until late winter or early spring after they have frozen and thawed several times. Avoid European cranberrybush, whose berries birds don't eat.

## SOURCES OF MATERIALS

Most nurseries and seed catalogs now recognize and promote the values of certain plants for birds and other wildlife. Staff people often can advise you on your best choices. In fact several nurseries in Wisconsin specialize in food and cover plants for wildlife.

You may transplant many tree and shrub species from a friend's rural property or from extra stock in a neighbor's yard. Remember, you must have the landowner's permission to take plants. You may not remove plants from public lands.

Owners of large rural properties may qualify to buy a Conservation Packet from the Department of Natural Resources. A packet contains several hundred young trees and shrubs at a nominal cost. You must use these plants for conservation, not landscape purposes. For more information, contact your county DNR forester.

The National Wildlife Federation offers a national recognition program for individuals who develop backyard wildlife habitat. Many helpful materials are available in conjunction with the program; see the "Gardening with Wildlife Kit" mentioned below, or write to the National Wildlife Federation for information on the backyard program.

The following list of plants has been compiled primarily for Wisconsin home owners who want to have attractive plantings which also encourage birds. If you are interested in the design of home areas, publication G1923, *Planning and Designing Your Home Landscape*, may be of help.

Name	Food		Cover	Nesting	Habitat	Remarks
	Quality	Season				
<b>LARGE TREES</b>						
<i>Betula alleghaniensis</i> <b>Yellow Birch</b>	Good	Late Winter	Fair	Fair	Good soil	Finches like it
<i>Celtis occidentalis</i> <b>Common Hackberry</b>	Excel.	Winter	Fair	Fair	Alkaline soil	Excellent shade tree. Many birds use berries.
<i>Larix decidua</i> <b>European Larch*</b>	Good	Winter	Fair	Fair	Sun, average soil	Buds eaten; attractive also because of insects in foliage.
<i>Picea glauca</i> <b>White Spruce</b>	Fair	Winter	Excel.	Excel.	Moist, rich soil	Evergreen. Not much food.
<i>Pinus strobus</i> Eastern White Pine	Fair	Winter	Good	Good	Avg. conditions, sun	Evergreen. Not much food.
<i>Prunus serotina</i> <b>Black Cherry</b>	Excel.	Fall	Fair	Fair	Avg. conditions, sun	Liked by 35 species of birds. Fast-growing, weak-wooded.
<i>Tsuga canadensis</i> <b>Canada Hemlock</b>	Good	Winter	Excel.	Good	Requires winter shade	Evergreen. Finches in winter.
<i>Quercus sp.</i> <b>Oak</b>	Good-Excel.	Fall, Winter	Fair	Fair	Variable	Birds feed on insects the trees attract. Some birds use acorns. Attractive shade trees.

**MEDIUM-SIZE TREES**

<i>Betula papyrifera</i> <b>Paper Birch</b>	Fair	Aug. -Sept.	Fair	Fair	Cool soils	Rapidly growing ornamental.
<i>Prunus pensylvanica</i> <b>Pin Cherry</b>	Excel.	Summer	Fair	Fair	Average soil, sun	Used by some 25 species of birds.
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i> <b>Eastern Arborvitae</b>	Fair		Excel.	Excel.	Average, likes moisture	Evergreen.

\*Not native to Wisconsin

Name	Food		Cover	Nesting	Habitat	Remarks
	Quality	Season				
<b>LOW-GROWING TREES</b>						
<i>Amelanchier sp.</i> <b>Serviceberry</b>	Excel.	Summer	Fair	Fair	Average soil and moisture	Many species of birds use it.
<i>Cornus alternifolia</i> <b>Pagoda Dogwood</b>	Excel.	Summer and Fall	Fair	Good	Moist, cool soil	Very ornamental, often used as a shrub.
<i>Crataegus crus-galli</i> <b>Cockspur Hawthorn</b>	Good	Late fall and winter	Good	Excel.	Likes lime, heavy soil, and sun	Fruit hangs on nearly all winter Many birds use it.
<i>Crataegus succulenta</i> <i>var macracantha</i> <b>Spike Hawthorn</b>	Good	Fall and winter	Good	Good	Good soil	Attractive shiny foilage.
<i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i> <i>(cordata)</i> <b>Washington Hawthorn*</b>	Good	Late fall and winter	Good	Good	Good soil, sun	Smallest fruits of the hawthorns.
<i>Crataegus punctata</i> <b>Dotted Hawthorn</b>	Good	Fall and winter	Good	Good	Good soil, sun	Horizontally branched; flowers have strong odor
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i> <b>Eastern Redcedar</b>	Excel.	Winter	Excel.	Excel.	Sun, light soil	Should not be grown near apples or native crabs many birds, especially wax-wings, use fruits.
<i>Malus 'Bob White'</i> <b>Bob White Crabapple*</b>	Fair	Winter	Good	Fair to good	Average conditions, sun	Persistent tiny yellow fruits.
<i>Malus floribunda</i> <b>Japanese Flowering Crabapple*</b>	Fair	Winter	Good	Fair to good	Average conditions, sun	Not bothered by apple rust.
<i>Malus zumi calocarpa</i> <b>Redbud Crabapple*</b>	Fair	Winter	Good	Fair to good	Average conditions, sun	Persistent tiny bright red fruits. Very attractive in winter.
<i>Prunus americana</i> <b>American Plum</b>	Fair	Fall	Good	Good	Average soil, sun	Makes good screen, good nesting cover.
<i>Prunus virginiana</i> <b>Common Chokecherry</b>	Excel.	Summer	Fair	Fair	Light to good soil, sun	More than 70 species of birds eat berries.

\*Not native to Wisconsin

Name	Food		Cover	Nesting	Habitat	Remarks
	Quality	Season				
<i>Sorbus americana</i> <b>American Mountainash</b>	Excel., fruits well	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Cool soil	Robins and wax- wings like it.
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> <b>European Mountainash*</b>	Excel., fruits well	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Cool soil	Robins and wax- wings like it.

## HIGH-GROWING SHRUBS

<i>Cornus amomum</i> <b>Silky Dogwood</b>	Excel.	Fall	Fair	Good	Average moist soil	More than 80 species of birds eat dogwood fruit.
<i>Cornus mas</i> <b>Corneliancherry Dogwood*</b>	Good	Fall	Fair	Good	Average soil	Hardy in southern Wisconsin only.
<i>Cornus racemosa</i> <b>Gray Dogwood</b>	Excel., fruits well	Fall	Fair	Fair	Average con- ditions	Easily grown. Attractive.
<i>Cornus sericea</i> ( <i>stolonifera</i> ) <b>Redosier Dogwood</b>	Excel.	Fall	Fair	Fair	Moist con- ditions	Good winter twig color.
<i>Rhus glabra</i> <b>Smooth Sumac</b>	Fair	Winter	Fair	Fair	Average, sun	Too open to make good cover.
<i>Rhus typhina</i> <b>Staghorn Sumac</b>	Fair	Winter	Fair	Fair	Indifferent, sun	Too open to make good cover
<i>Sambucus canadensis</i> <b>American Elder</b>	Excel., large amount	Late sum- mer and fall	Good	Good	Moist soil best	Over 100 species known to use it. Quantity of food ex- cellent.
<i>Sambucus pubens</i> <b>Scarlet Elder</b>	Fair, large amount	Summer	Good	Good	Indifferent	Not as palatable as American elder.
<i>Shepherdia argentea</i> <b>Silver Buffaloberry*</b>	Excel., good amount	Summer	Good	Good	Dry soil, sun	Difficult to use because of gray foliage.
<i>Viburnum dentatum</i> <b>Arrowwood Viburnum*</b>	Good	Late sum- mer, early fall	Good	Good	Moist soil	Fast growing
<i>Viburnum lentago</i> <b>Nannyberry Viburnum</b>	Good	Late fall, winter	Good	Good	Moist soil	Combines well with gray dogwood. Clusters of black fruits.
<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i> <b>Blackhaw Viburnum</b>	Good	Fall and winter	Good	Good	Average	Attractive fall color.

\*Not native to Wisconsin.

Name	Food		Cover	Nesting	Habitat	Remarks
	Quality	Season				
<i>Viburnum trilobum</i> <b>American Cranberry-bush Viburnum</b>	Fair	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Moist soil	Attractive in fruit. Cardinals like fruit.
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> <b>Common Buttonbush</b>	Fair	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Average soil, moist	Sometimes a large shrub.

## MEDIUM-SIZED SHRUBS

<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i> <b>Red Chokeberry*</b>	Good	Fall	Fair	Fair	Good, moist soil	Height, 7 to 8 feet.
<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i> <b>Black Chokeberry</b>	Good	Fall	Fair	Fair	Good, wet or dry	Height, 5 to 6 feet.
<i>Corylus americana</i> <b>Hazlenut</b>	Good	Late summer, Fall	Good	Fair	Average	Nuts usually infested with insects in the wild.
<i>Ilex verticillata</i> <b>Common Winterberry</b>	Good	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Acid soil, wet areas	Very attractive.
<i>Rosa rugosa</i> <b>Rugosa Rose*</b>	Excel.	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Average soil, good drainage, sun	Attractive fruit, salt tolerant.
<i>Rubus allegheniensis</i> <b>Alleghany Blackberry</b>	Excel.	Summer and fall	Fair	Fair	Average, sun	Difficult to handle in average home planting.

## SMALL SHRUBS

<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> <b>Japanese Barberry*</b>	Fair	Fall and winter	Good	Fair	Average	Does not blend well into most bird plantings.
<i>Juniperus communis depressa</i> <b>Oldfield Common Juniper</b>	Good	Fall, Winter persistent	Good	Good	Light, dry soil, sun	Good ground cover
<i>Prunus pumila</i> <b>Sand Cherry</b>	Fair	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Light, dry soil	Attractive, low shrub for dry areas.
<i>Rhus aromatica</i> <b>Fragrant Sumac</b>	Fair	Winter	Good	Good	Average to dry, sun	Excellent bank cover.
<i>Rosa blanda</i> <b>Meadow Rose</b>	Good	Winter	Fair to poor	Fair	Average, sun	Good winter color. Attractive flowers.

\*Not native to Wisconsin

Name	Food		Cover	Nesting	Habitat	Remarks
	Quality	Season				
<i>Rosa Carolina (humilis)</i> <b>Carolina Rose</b>	Good	Winter	Fair	Fair	Indifferent as to soil, moist to wet, sun	Good at edge of pool or pond.
<i>Rosa palustris</i> <b>Swamp rose</b>	Good	Winter	Fair	Fair	Indifferent as to soil, moist to wet, sun	One of our more common native roses.
<i>Rose virginiana (lucida)</i> <b>Virginia Rose*</b>	Good	Winter	Fair	Fair to good	Average soil, average to moist, sun	Fruits remain colorful into winter.
<i>Rubus idaeus (strigosus)</i> <b>Red Raspberry</b>	Excel.	Summer and fall	Poor	Poor	Indifferent	Eaten by large number of species.
<i>Rubus occidentalis</i> <b>Blackcap Raspberry</b>	Excel.	Summer and fall	Fair to poor	Fair to poor	Indifferent to soil, good drainage	Eaten by large number of species.
<i>Symphoricarpos albus laevigatus</i> <b>Common Snowberry*</b>	Fair	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Average to dry	White fruit. Not generally held into winter.
<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i> <b>Indiancurrant Coralberry*</b>	Good	Winter	Fair	Fair	Average to dry	Excellent ground-cover plant.

VINES

<i>Campsis radicans</i> <b>Trumpetvine*</b>	Excel.	Summer	Fair	Poor	Average, sun	Hummingbirds use nectar.
<i>Celastrus scandens</i> <b>American Bittersweet</b>	Fair	Winter	Poor to fair	Poor	Average, sun	Needs sun to fruit well.
<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i> <b>Virginia Creeper</b>	Excel.	Fall and winter	Fair	Fair	Average	Englemann's variety of the Virginia creeper, clings to walls.
<i>Vitis labrusca</i> <b>Fox grape</b>	Excel.	Fall and winter	Good	Fair	indifferent	Eaten by large numbers of birds. Used on fences and arbors.
<i>Vitis riparia</i> <b>Riverbank Grape</b>	Excel.	Fall and winter	Good	Fair	Indifferent	(same as above)
<i>Vitis vulpina</i> <b>Frost Grape</b>	Excel.	Fall and winter	Good	Fair	Indifferent	(same as above)

\*Not native to Wisconsin

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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*Squirrels.* 1982. G. Barquest. S. Craven. and R. Ellarson. University of Wisconsin-Extension No. G2091. 32pp.

*Bird Feeding: Tips for Beginners and Veterans.*

1983. S.R. Craven and R.L. Ruff. University of Wisconsin-Extension No. G3176. 12pp.

*Invite Birds to Your Home/Conservation Plantings*

*for the Midwest* 1971. USDA-Soil Conservation Service. PA-982.

Gardening with Wildlife Kit, 1986. National Wildlife

Federation, 1412 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. (This kit contains numerous publica-

tions, planting guides, seeds, references, information on the Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program, and many other useful items. \$16.95 + \$2 shipping charge. Note: The resource list "Where to Dig" is especially useful.)

*American Wildlife and Plants—A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits.* 1961. A.C. Martin, H.S. Zim, and A.L. Nelson. Dover Publications, New York, N.Y. 500pp. \$3.95. Original version 1951, McGraw-Hill Inc., N.Y.

Check with your local county Extension office for prices of University of Wisconsin-Extension publications.

Consult any of several good field guides, the Wisconsin DNR-Bureau of Endangered Resources, Wisconsin county Extension offices, magazines such as 'Audubon' or "National Wildlife" and any good bookstore nature section for more information.

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