

Attracting Birds All Year Long

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We all enjoy sitting outdoors in the morning or evening and listen to the birds singing their harmonious and pleasant songs. The sounds of cardinals, blue jays, and robins are simply music to the ears in the opinion of many a bird lover. What are the tricks to attracting these voices of nature to your backyard and bring them back time after time? Let's look at some ways that we can attract birds to our yards while also helping them at the same time.

It is easy to attract birds to our backyards throughout all the seasons, but it is winter when the birds need our help the most. According to HGTV, birds are in greater need of our help through the winter months because they are utilizing a clear majority of their energy and time to look for food, water, and shelter. We can help in a lot of different ways to provide all these resource needs for birds and turn out yards into a place where birds can find shelter and get some food.

One common thing that comes to mind with attracting birds is plant selection. Each species of bird is going to be attracted to a different species of plants, particularly when it comes to plant height. Birds like food and shelter at varying heights or in a canopy of tall trees over smaller trees or shrubs. Landscape designer Doug Gagne says homeowners want to go for a tiered approach by placing taller tree species at the border of your property, with smaller trees and bushes next, followed by tall grasses and low growing flowers to imitate what birds typically find in nature. Offering this type of approach is one way to attract a variety of different birds.

The idea with attracting bird species is providing them with a source of food that they prefer. Most birds are going to prefer a variety of plants that produce an adequate selection of fruits and berries, especially those which bear fruit through the winter months. Horticulturalist Kimberly Eierman says that species that bear fruits into the winter will show up early in the season but will not be palatable to birds until a series of freezing and thaw cycles take place which she says is "nature's way of providing food for the birds,". Shrub species that support berries throughout the winter include: winterberry holly, bayberry, and viburnum. HGTV writes that a few species in the rose family will produce a red or orange fleshy fruit during the winter months known as rose "hips" which can also be a good choice for birds.

Grasses have also proven to be an attractant for birds, primarily the seed produced. Many of the grasses that are native to the area can be a great food source for birds as many species like the seeds. HGTV says one way to make certain your grasses are a friend to the birds is to leave them alone and not trim back the seed heads until spring to leave seed but also shelter for any birds who may be passing through. Some of you might think this is a bad idea not to trim the grass until spring due to appearance, but you will not regret it when birds come to visit! What are some grasses to consider for a climate like ours? Species such as switch grass, little bluestem, and big bluestem have proven to provide the most benefit to bird attraction.

Perennials just like the native grasses are a great addition to your garden or landscape to aid in bird attraction. Same tips apply to perennials on restraining from trimming back the seed heads to provide seed to the birds well into the winter. Kim Eierman suggests species such as coneflower, blazing star, or sunflowers as some popular perennial favorites among birds with the suggestion to plant these in large groups so enough seed is available for all the bird visitors.

Beyond plant selection, there are a few more things that we can do for birds, not only in the winter but well throughout the year. One main thing is accessibility of water for the birds. For those that have bird feeders, it is important to keep a clean supply of water available in your birdbath, especially in the winter time when it can be difficult to find water. Believe it or not, there are warmers sold for birdbaths to keep the water from freezing in the winter months and even birdbaths with warmers already built in.

No matter the season, there are several things we can do to lend a hand to the wildlife that we coexist with. Birds are delightful for many people for their appearance and especially the beautiful songs they sing, but for that to happen, they rely on the food and water we provide them. The birds will surely be grateful for your help!