

Plants for Birds



Explore the Audubon native plants for birds database at audubon.org/nativeplants

WATER FOR BIRDS

All birds need water for drinking and for bathing. By providing a clean, fresh source, you will attract more species that will visit bird feeders.

Natural Sources

If you have a natural water source on your property, such as a stream or wetland, enhance its attractiveness and wildlife value by protecting and restoring native plant species and allowing the vegetation along the banks to grow high to create a buffer zone.



Photo by Dave Powell, US Forest Svc.

Supplemental Sources

BIRD BATHS

This is a simple, popular way to provide water, with endless designs available at garden centers and wild bird supply stores. The sides should incline gently to a depth of no more than two to three inches. The surface should be rough for better footing. To protect vulnerable bathing birds from lurking predators, locate the bath some distance from cover, about 15 feet is a good distance. Change the water every few days and keep the bath scrubbed clean. Birds are attracted to the sound of running water and a drip or misting feature will increase the number of visitors. Water heaters will keep the water free of ice during winter months in colder climates.



PONDS AND WATER GARDENS

The creation of these water elements will take some work but, done well, they can attract many species. Ponds for birds should be shallow, with gently sloping shorelines.

SHELTER FOR BIRDS

Birds need places where they can hide from predators and inclement weather. Trees, shrubs, meadows, and even rock walls provide such shelter.

Natural Sources

Native trees and shrubs of different densities and heights give birds places of retreat and safety. In winter, evergreens, hedgerows, and dense thickets offer critical cover. Place feeding stations close enough to vegetation so that birds can make a quick escape but far enough to allow for a wide visual field for watching possible threats.



613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT 06831 | 203-869-5272

Let's grow 1 million bird-friendly plants together

Plants for Birds



Explore the Audubon native plants for birds database at audubon.org/nativeplants



Supplemental Sources

If your yard is lacking appropriate shelter for wildlife, create a brush pile from fallen branches and leaves. Or, toss your discarded Christmas tree a few feet away from the feeder, far enough so that a lurking cat can't pounce from behind it onto a ground-feeding bird but close enough for the birds to find speedy cover. A dry stone wall, with its nooks and crannies, or simply small piles of rocks can also provide hiding spots, as can a pile of logs. You can also erect boxes designed specifically for roosting, with the entrance hole near the bottom so that heat doesn't escape. Mount the box in a sheltered area, preferably facing south.

NESTING FOR BIRDS

Birds will remain in your habitat during the breeding season if they have places to nest and raise young. Different species have different requirements. Some nest in cavities, many others have open nests found on ledges or in a tree crotch, and others nest on the ground. Get to know which species are likely to nest in your area and provide the appropriate habitat or structure.

Natural Sources

Native trees and shrubs provide good nesting areas for many species, from those that nest in holes to those that create cup-shaped nests in the crotches of branches to those that build nests at the tops of the canopy. Include a mix of evergreen and deciduous plants, a hedgerow, and vines. For grassland species such as meadowlarks, make sure you let a meadow grow all season. Where safety permits, allow snags—dead trees—to remain standing. Woodpeckers and others excavate the rotting wood looking for insects; the resulting holes are used by cavity-nesting birds.



Photo by Steven J. Saffier/NAS

Supplemental Sources

Nest boxes make a wonderful addition to a yard, allowing you to easily watch a family raise its young. Wrens, swallows, bluebirds, purple martins, chickadees, and titmice are some of the species that readily use nest boxes. Identify the species of bird you'd like to attract to determine the correct size of the entrance hole needed. You may want to consider erecting a shelf-style structure for species such as robins and phoebes. Nest boxes should be mounted on a pole, fence post, or tree. Height of the nest depends on the species. For most backyard cavity nesters, a height of at least five feet is recommended. Ventilation and drainage holes are necessary, as is access to the interior to allow periodic cleaning. Baffles and metal guards to deter predators are encouraged. You can assist birds in building their nests by supplying some of the materials they seek, such as twigs, short lengths of string, yarn, thread, cotton, hair brushed from a pet, and sphagnum moss. Leave the offerings in a tray or in a net bag hung from a tree.



Let's grow 1 million bird-friendly plants together