

# Inviting birds for the holidays (and all winter long)

## BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES

We do a lot of preparation for the visitors we'll see over the holidays but since some of our favorite visitors are birds, they deserve some preparation as well. It's not the season for planting of course, but there are plenty of things you can do now and some of the preferred plants listed below may be worth adding to your landscape in future years.

Some of the things we can do and offer are highly visible to us as well as to them. Birdfeeders, of course, in a variety of shapes and sizes and with a variety of offerings—suet, seeds ranging from tiny thistle seeds to sunflower and safflower seeds. Having heated water available offers them moisture even on the coldest days, and trees and shrubs with the fruits and berries mentioned below are a visual treat to us and essential foods to them.

While we may think of dead leaves and plants as just, well, dead leaves and plants, they're a full pantry for many birds. Besides the seeds they contain, they shelter overwintering insects and lots of organic matter.



### **Fruiting shrubs**

- Conifers offer food for cedar waxwings, swallows, bluebirds and catbirds.
- Crabapples with small fruits are best. Many crabapples and other fruits require freeze and thaw to become palatable, so they're important late-season offerings.
- Dogwoods help feed migrating songbirds, robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, vireos, kingbirds, juncos, cardinals, warblers, wild turkey and grouse.
- Hackberry seeds are relished by cardinals, northern flickers and northern mockingbirds.
- Hawthorns, especially our native downy hawthorn.
- Oaks with small acorns are best for birds—dwarf chinkapin oak offers an abundance of them.
- Persimmons are sought after by bobwhites and eastern bluebirds.
- Sumacs offers persistent fruits for more than 30 species of birds.
- Viburnum berries are sought-after by many birds, and often late in the season.

### **Berries, but not just any-berry**

- Birds need high-fat, high-carb foods in fall, either for a demanding migration or to survive harsh winters. Appropriately the native berries ripening late season—black raspberry, elderberry, chokecherry and rough-leaf dogwood—are some of the most nutritious and contain 30-50 percent fat.
- By contrast, non-natives like multiflora rose, Amur honeysuckle and autumn olive contain just 3-4 percent fat. And birds may not recognize or eat them, even when they're hungry.
- Species that don't migrate, like cardinals and woodpeckers, depend heavily on winter berries.
- Cardinals and native sparrows crush berries before swallowing, so they can eat larger berries.
- Robins and bluebirds eat berries whole and then spit out seeds, ultimately replanting some of their favorite foods.
- Robins, bluebirds, cedar waxwings, and mockingbirds aren't able to hull seeds with their bills, so they're very dependent on berries.
- Persistence makes a difference. Honeysuckle and dogwood fruits are usually eaten or rotted by late November while roses, crabapples and viburnums offer wintering birds like waxwings and robins sustenance into early spring.

### **Give me shelter**

- Conifers offer valuable shelter during harsh winter months when deciduous trees have lost their foliage.
- Most birds roost just 4-6 feet from the ground, so having different layers of groundcovers, grasses, taller perennials, shrubs, vines and trees is essential for protection from the elements and from predators.
- The denser, more camouflaged and more prickly the habitat, the better protection it offers from predators on the ground or overhead.
- In spring, Baltimore orioles and other birds use the strong fibers of dried up plant stems to build nests.
- Safety is as important as food. Birds may choose less-favored foods in safe conditions over more desirable foods with less protection.
- Sheltered areas that face south take advantage of winter sun.