

One in a series of informational brochures produced by the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Chester County, sponsored by Penn State University's Cooperative Extension. Penn State Extension Master Gardeners are volunteers who educate the public on best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship. They receive horticultural training from Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences Cooperative Extension.

For answers on any home gardening issue, call the Master Gardener Hotline at 610-696-3500 or email [chestermg@psu.edu](mailto:chestermg@psu.edu).

July 2011

Penn State Extension Master Gardeners  
Government Services Center  
601 Westtown Road, Suite 370  
West Chester, PA 19380-0990  
610-696-3500  
[chestermg@psu.edu](mailto:chestermg@psu.edu)  
[Chester.extension.psu.edu](http://Chester.extension.psu.edu)

An **OUTREACH** program of the  
College of Agricultural Sciences

**Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.**

Visit Penn State Extension on the web: [extension.psu.edu](http://extension.psu.edu)

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Penn State Cooperative Extension is implied.

Penn State encourages persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation or have questions about the physical access provided, please contact [Name and phone number] in advance of your participation or visit.

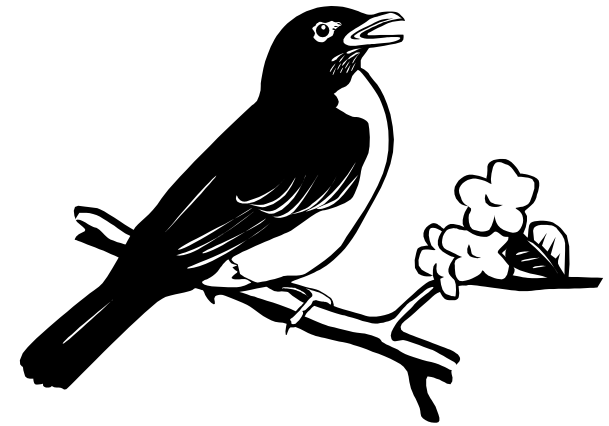
This publication is available in alternative media on request.

The Pennsylvania State University is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. It is the policy of the University to maintain an academic and work environment free of discrimination, including harassment. The Pennsylvania State University prohibits discrimination and harassment against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. Discrimination or harassment against faculty, staff, or students will not be tolerated at The Pennsylvania State University. Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to the Affirmative Action Director, The Pennsylvania State University, 328 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802-5901; Tel 814-865-4700/V, 814-863-1150/TTY.

# Penn State **Extension**

# Gardening to Attract Birds

[extension.psu.edu](http://extension.psu.edu)



**PENN STATE**



Cooperative Extension  
College of Agricultural Sciences

## Why Garden to Attract Birds?

While some gardeners are only interested in growing plants for human enjoyment, others like to grow plants that attract wildlife, particularly birds. Birds are lovely to see, fun to watch, and are helpful in the garden, as they eat insects and help with pollination.

In order to attract a variety of birds to your yard, you need to offer three essential elements:

- Shelter
- Food
- Water

Provide these resources and birds will be attracted to your yard as a place to live and raise their young.

## Shelter

*Birds need shelter from the elements, protection from predators, and safe places to build nests.*

- Plant some tall native trees such as oak, hickory, or beech. For faster results, plant some smaller trees such as redbud, native dogwood, and birch. You will need trees to attract most songbirds.
- Plant lots of native shrubs, grouped together in a woodland setting. Dense shrubbery will offer nesting sites and protection from predators.
- When possible, allow dead trees to stand. They provide both food and ideal nesting sites for some birds.
- Put up nest boxes. You may attract cavity nesters such as wrens, woodpeckers, and bluebirds.

## Food

*Adult birds eat a variety of foods, including insects, worms, berries, seeds, and nectar. All baby birds need protein from insects, worms, spiders, and other animals. The more food sources you can offer, the more birds you will attract.*

- Minimize pesticide use. They kill baby bird food—they are not so great for the birds, either.

- Choose native plants. Native trees and shrubs provide the diversity of native insects that baby birds need to survive.
- Select a variety of trees and shrubs that offer nuts and berries year-round.
- Let leaf litter accumulate. Many birds find their food by scratching on the ground for bugs and other critters.
- Let some grassy areas grow into meadows to provide a good home for insects.
- Keep the feeders filled year-round. They are great fun to watch—and help the birds, too.

## Water

*Birds must have water for drinking and bathing.*

Provide water in the form of a birdbath or pond. A water feature has the added benefit of attracting birds that won't come to a feeder.

## Getting started

Creating an ideal bird habitat is probably going to take some time, but here's what you can do to get started.

- Take stock of the resources available in your yard, such as trees, shrubs, meadows, or water sources. Nurture those assets and make them the foundation of your bird habitat.
- Begin planning for more wooded areas and less lawn. Turf grass offers little value to birds and other animals.
- When you choose a tree or shrubs for your yard, be sure to choose native plants. Indigenous plants are critical to a thriving bird habitat.
- Tell your neighbors about what you are doing and encourage them to do the same.

## Bring Hummingbirds to Your Yard

To attract migrating hummingbirds, provide plants that offer nectar-rich blossoms in late April and early May, such as azalea, penstemon, native columbine, Virginia bluebell, eastern redbud and bleeding heart.

To enjoy watching hummingbirds all summer, offer a variety of long-blooming, nectar-rich plants such as native honeysuckle, trumpet vine, bee-balm, phlox, cardinal flower, impatiens, and fuchsia.

Help them out with hummingbird feeders filled with a syrup made from 1/4 cup white sugar to 1 cup water (boil the water to make it easier for the sugar to dissolve, then let the mixture cool). Do not use red dyes!

## A word about native trees and shrubs

Use a native plant reference to find the Latin names of the native plants you need. Don't buy a plant unless it has the correct Latin name attached. Many trees and shrubs, such as holly, viburnum, dogwood, maple, and azalea, come in both native and alien types—and the aliens are the ones most often sold at garden centers. Non-native plants do not support the variety and abundance of insects the birds need to survive.

## Some trees and shrubs that are a good source of fruit for birds

Serviceberry *Amelanchier*  
Spicebush *Lindera benzoin*  
American Beautyberry *Callicarpa americana*  
Pin Cherry *Prunus pennsylvanica*  
Dogwood *Cornus*  
American Holly *Ilex opaca*  
Winterberry holly *Ilex verticillata*  
American beech *Fagus grandifolia*  
White Pine *Pinus strobus*  
American Cranberrybush *Viburnum trilobum*  
Juniper *Juniperus virginiana*  
Elderberry *Sambucus Canadensis*  
Blueberry *Vaccinium corymbosum*