

For Vermont Standard

Second of series of columns on gardening by

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Note: you have illustration sent over (a line drawing) to use with column

## Gardening for a Bird Friendly Backyard

### Part I: Providing Food

Because somebody filched my identify-by-color bird guide I can't tell you who the visitor was bumping into my window this morning except that it had a bright red bib on black with some white markings. This was on snowy Mother's Day and like a robin that has been knocking itself out on another window for two weeks, this bird was doubtless looking for black flies that had the sense to hide from the snow.

One worries when robins choose black flies over worms; has something gone awry with its food chain too? However, action being the best defense against worry, we're pursuing a bird-friendly backyard this summer and hope you'll join in.

Think food, water, cover and sustainable gardening practices, a fast track to a National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat.

<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/create.cfm>).

Let's start with bird-appropriate dining. Think trees and shrubs, large and small; brambles and vines, grasses and wildflowers and even dead trees. Sometimes it's more about what not to change in a semi-wild environment rather than what to plant in addition to native species.

The table below lists some common plants for backyards (please note I did not say "gardens" because some of these plants in a garden never leave) that attract feathered friends ranging from hummingbirds to turkeys. Large trees attract pine siskins and pine grosbeaks. Cedar waxwings adore hawthorns and mountain ash. Hermit thrushes, bluebirds and flickers feed on sumacs, while grouse and both hermit and wood thrushes love wild grapes. Goldfinches sway on grasses and feed atop thistles. Flowers, of course, attract hummingbirds. Finally, woodpeckers, nuthatches, brown creepers, and black and white warblers feed on insects in dead and dying trees.

The very best food sources for native birds are native species of plants such as serviceberry, pine, oaks, sumac and elderberry.

<b>LARGE TREES</b>	<b>LARGE SHRUBS</b>
Pine, Oak, Beech, Maple,	Staghorn Sumac, Choke Cherry,

Hemlock, Birch, Black Cherry, Aspen	Speckled Alder
<b>SMALLER TREES</b> E. Red Cedar, Apple, Crabapple. Hawthorn, Mountain Ash, Serviceberry	<b>SMALLER SHRUBS</b> Dogwood, Elderberry, Blueberry, Huckleberry, Viburnum, Pussy Willow
<b>BRAMBLES &amp; VINES</b>	<b>GRASSES &amp; WILDFLOWERS</b>
Blackberries Raspberries. Virginia Creeper, Grapes	Sedges, Sheep Sorrel, Curly Dock, Milk Weed, Pigweed, Dandelion, Thistle, White Clover, Black- eyed Susan, Sunflower, Goldenrod, Evening Primrose, Queen Ann's Lace, Lamb's Quarters

Part II will discuss water and shelter requirements for a bird-friendly backyard.

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can't remember how you mentioned garden club last week but it was fine. Thx.

## Gardening for a Bird Friendly Backyard

### Part II: Water and Cover

Just for fun Google "songs about birds." Now, the challenge is to get that birdsong into the backyard. The mantra is food (last week's subject), water and cover.

Birds need sources of clean, preferably moving water for drinking, bathing and reproduction, but change the water in a still birdbath several times weekly (to preclude mosquitoes) and they'll be fine. Gardens that incorporate puddles for butterflies, ornamental ponds or rain gardens also suffice.

Cover refers to places where birds can find shelter from predators and the weather, as well as feeling safe around humans. Following are places birds frequent (asterisks connote preferred nesting places): Wooded area\*, bramble patch, ground cover, rock pile or wall, cave\*, roosting box\*, dense shrubs or

thicket\*, evergreens\*, brush or log pile, dead trees or snags\*, burrow\*, meadow\*, water garden or pond\*. Two of the above would be ideal.

Maybe not cleaning up that brush pile is a good idea. And remember to have cover available near bird feeders and bird baths, but not too near, so that the birds don't feel like sitting ducks (pun intended). Oh yes, keep your pet cats indoors.

Along this journey a backyard can be transformed into a Certified Wildlife Habitat with the National Wildlife Federation (<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/create.cfm>).

Part III will discuss environmentally friendly gardening practices that assist a bird-friendly backyard.

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Gardening for a Bird Friendly Backyard  
Part 111: Environmentally Friendly Gardening Practices

A joy of spring is opening a bedroom window at night to hear bird song at dawn. Creating a bird-friendly backyard intensifies this pleasure. After all, there has to be a little quid pro quo here; we make it nice for the birds and in return they sing for us.

Two previous columns outlined four requirements birds have for becoming tenants: food, water, cover and places to raise their young. You know, come to think of it, birds may be ahead of the game because they're not using sippy cups and eating food from tin cans, both of which can harbor toxins. But keeping an eye on the bird ball, a fifth requirement is focusing on sustainable gardening practices that may create of a backyard a Certified Wildlife Habitat with the National Wildlife Federation (<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/create.cfm>). Just follow at least two of these three steps: 1) **Soil and Water Conservation:** Use Mulch • Capture Rain Water from Roof • Drip or Soaker Hose for Irrigation • Limit Water Use • Reduce Erosion (i.e. ground cover, terraces) • Rain Garden • Riparian Buffer • Xeriscape (water-wise landscaping in dry climates, unlike Vermont); 2) **Control Exotic Species:** Practice Integrated Pest Management • Remove Non-Native Plants and Animals • Use Native Plants • Reduce Lawn Areas; 3) **Organic Practices:** Eliminate Chemical Pesticides • Eliminate Chemical Fertilizers • Compost

If we follow these steps we can have a backyard that allows birds to thrive right where we live. Even more, it gives us stolen moments of entertainment

throughout the day in all seasons – from seeing the perky chickadee perch on a snowy branch, the first robin tug a worm out of the lawn, the baby rose-breasted grosbeaks towering over their more elegant parents, or the flock of cedar waxwings cluster on a native berry bush during their fall migration.