Landscaping for Birds

Anyone can create a wildlife sanctuary in their own backyard by providing animals with 3 main requirements: food, water, and cover.

Food Requirements

Some of our most common backyard birds, including bluebirds, cardinals, chickadees, robins, and woodpeckers, do not migrate and are year-round residents in NC. Because we have several resident bird species it is very important that your yard provides food for every season. Providing a variety of native plants is essential for an optimal bird habitat. In the spring, insects and spiders are the most important food source for many birds, especially young ones. Insects provide young birds with protein and calcium, which are essential for growth. During the fall and winter when insect populations decrease plant seeds and fruit become the main staples of many birds. Examples of native plants that provide good sources of food include hollies (Ilex spp.), wax myrtle (Myrica cerifera), oaks (Quercus spp.) and dogwood (Cornus florida). It is important to plant a mix of short and tall plants within the same area to provide habitat for ground and shrub-dwelling birds along side treetop birds. Be sure to also provide a diversity of deciduous and evergreen plants to your yard. Evergreen plants are essential to providing winter cover to resident birds.

Supplements

Birdfeeders can be used in addition to native plants in order to supplement some food requirements. Sunflowers, safflower, white millet, and thistle seed are all good seed types to add to your feeders. Birdfeeders are most often used during the winter months when natural food sources are scarce. Once you begin feeding birds in the winter it is important to continue throughout the entire season as some birds become dependent on the feeders.

If you do not have a natural water source available in your yard, a birdbath or artificial pond is a great way to provide birds with a reliable supply of water.

Dead trees are important nesting sites for woodpeckers and bluebirds and should not be removed from your yard unless they pose a safety hazard. In the absence of dead trees, nesting boxes can be used.
Backyard Birds

Ruby Throated Hummingbird

The ruby-throated hummingbird (Archilochus colubris) typically arrives in our area sometime in late March or early April. This time of year they begin their journey back to North Carolina from their wintering areas in Mexico, Central or South America, or the Caribbean. April is the time to clean your feeder, add a syrup of 4 parts water and 1 part sugar, and set it out in a sunny area near blooming flowers.

The ruby-throated hummingbird is a daytime feeder that feeds mainly on flower nectar and small insects. This bird prefers red tubular flowers as a nectar source, so be sure to provide red flowers to your garden if you intend on attracting hummingbirds. Early spring is the best time to plant your hummingbird garden. Plant a variety of nectar plants that will provide food through-out the growing season. As always, the use of native plants is encouraged. Some examples of native plants sure to attract the ruby-throated hummingbird include coral honeysuckle (Lonicera sempervirens), cross-vine (Bignonia capreolata), cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis), Eastern columbine (Aquilegia Canadensis), and bee balm (Monarda didyma), just to name a few. Consider the moisture and light requirements of plants before adding them to your hummingbird habitat and try to use perennial plants with mature heights of at least two feet whenever possible. Concentrating your flowering plants with similar bloom periods will allow the hummingbird’s easy access to nectar sources. Always remember to avoid using insect sprays, repellents, or pesticides on or around your hummingbird flowers or feeders.

With the return of the red-throated hummingbird, get ready to enjoy another spring and summer of watching these wonderfully energetic birds darting around your yard.

We are pleased to be able to provide you this educational information.

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