

Building A Bird Garden

Almost all species of North American birds have shown major declines in populations, some species down more than eighty per cent. Loss of habitat is the main reason with urban sprawl being a major part of it, according to a recent study by National Audubon Society.

Many species will adapt and live close to human populations if provided with their basic needs, and this should become a goal of every homeowner as the landscape is planned. The basic needs include food, water, cover and nesting area. These will differ with different species so a part of the planning should include a great deal of diversity to accommodate as many species as possible. Central Florida is not only home to a number of resident species which breed here but is also a very important stopping point for migrating species that rest and gain strength here before they continue south.

Food varies with species and may include a variety of types including seed, insects, fruits and other sources. Cover is provided by dense shrubbery that provides a place to hide from predators and to raise young. Leave as many thickets as possible on your property. Allow a natural area around the bird feeder and seeds will germinate and form more food. Insects form a normal part of any landscape unless use of pesticides such as lawn sprays make them toxic to wildlife.

Many common landscape plants produce fruits that are so important to birds and may also be beautiful and functional additions to the landscape. Some birds build open nests in dense shrubbery whereas others need hollow cavities that can be provided in the form of construction nestboxes. (See Biosphere's flyer on "Nestboxes" for species recommended in Central Florida). Some specialized types may depend on nectar from flowers (see Biosphere's flyer on "Attracting Hummingbirds to the Garden").

When selecting plant species for the bird garden, provide as much diversity as possible with plants that bloom or ripen fruit at different times, to guarantee a continual source of food. Remember that some fruiting species such as the hollies (*Ilex sp.*) and wax myrtles have both male and female plants, with only the females bearing fruit, so choose plants that are bearing. Supplement the plants with a well-placed feeder and remember to offer a source for water, perhaps a birdbath.

This flyer lists species that are important food and cover plants for birds in Central Florida.

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The following species that are important food and cover plants for birds in Central Florida:

Trees and Shrubs – provide fruit and cover

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| American Beauty Berry | (<i>Callicarpa americana</i>) |
| Bird Pepper | (<i>Capsicum annum</i>) |
| Black Gum | (<i>Nyssa sylvatica biflora</i>) |
| Blue Beech | (<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>) |
| Bottlebrush | (<i>Callistemon lanceolatus</i>) |
| Chickasaw Plum | (<i>Prunus angustifolia</i>) |
| Chinese Mulberry | (<i>Morus chinensis</i>) female only |
| Coral Honeysuckle | (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>) |
| Cypress | (<i>Taxodium sp.</i>) |
| Dahoon Holly | (<i>Ilex cassine</i>) female only |
| Duranta – Golden Dew Drop | (<i>Duranta erecta</i>) |
| Elderberry | (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>) |
| Firebush | (<i>Hamelia patens</i>) |
| Flatwoods Plum | (<i>Prunus umbellata</i>) |
| Florida Privet | (<i>Forestiera segregata</i>) |
| Fringe Tree | (<i>Chionanthus virginica</i>) female only |
| Hackberry | (<i>Celtis laevigata</i>) also butterfly host plant |
| Hickory | (<i>Carya sp.</i>) |
| Loblolly Bay | (<i>Gordonia lasianthus</i>) |
| Magnolia | (<i>Magnolia virginica</i>) |
| Oaks | (<i>Quercus sp.</i>) |
| Partridge Pea | (<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>) |
| Persimmon | (<i>Diospyrs virginiana</i>) |
| Pines | (<i>Pinus sp.</i>) seeds in cones |
| Pokeweed | (a weed for sure but a great producer for birds) |
| Pop Ash | (<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanicus</i>) |
| Red Cedar | (<i>Juniperus silicicola var. silicicola</i>) |
| Red Mulberry | (<i>Morus rubra</i>) native species, needs wet area |
| Silverthorn | (<i>Eleagnous pungens</i>) |
| Simpson's Stopper | (<i>Myrcianthes fragrans var. simpsonii</i>) |
| Swamp Dogwood | (<i>Cornus foemina</i>) |
| Sweetgum | (<i>Liquidamber styraciflua</i>) |
| Walters Viburnum | (<i>Viburnum obovatum</i>) |
| Wax Myrtle | (<i>Myrica cerifera</i>) female only |
| Wild Coffee | (<i>Psychotria nervosa</i>) |
| Yaupon Holly | (<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>) |

Native grasses – provide seeds for dove, quail and others

Wildflowers – provide seeds (see our wildflower seed list for a variety of wildflowers that do well in Central Florida)