

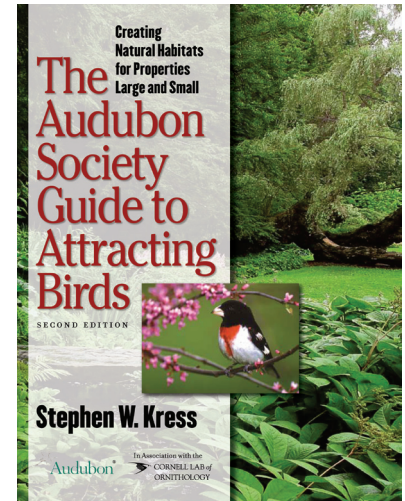


CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE BEST WAYS TO ATTRACT MORE SONGBIRDS TO YOUR PROPERTY

Compiled from *The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds*

With growing recognition that our climate is warming, native plants are the best choice for creating bird friendly habitats for the future. Native plants are adapted to temperature extremes of the past and they are the best bet for future changes because of their long history with local climates. If you are trying to bring more birds to your backyard, the single best thing to do is plant native shrubs, vines, and trees.



PROVIDE A WATER SOURCE near protective shrubs during the summer months. On hot days, birds are especially eager to bathe and drink. Bird baths should be only an inch or two deep with a shallow slope; a dripping effect will lure more birds. Mount the bath on a pedestal if cats prowl your neighborhood. Clean it once a week with a stiff brush.

CREATE A SONGBIRD BORDER along your property edge by planting trees and shrubs that meet the needs of birds throughout the year. Select native plants adapted to the weather extremes of your local climate. The border can take the form of a hedge or windbreak, depending on your property size. Plant several of each species adjacent to each other, selecting a mix of plants, with the tallest planted at the edges of the property, and shorter species tiered toward your home. Include at least one species of thorny tree, such as hawthorn or raspberry, for nesting. Also include evergreens, such as spruce, holly, or juniper, for cover. Plant berry-producing shrubs such as dogwood, serviceberry, and viburnum—that will provide fruit throughout the seasons.

CREATE A BRUSH PILE in a corner of your property. Each time a storm drops limbs, heap them up. During spring clean-up, save those downed branches and tree trunks from the community wood chipper. Layer the larger logs as a foundation, then build up the pile in successive layers. In large fields that are growing into young forest, create living brush piles by cutting neighboring saplings most of the way through the trunks, then pulling them into a collective heap. Songbirds will find shelter from extreme weather in such cover throughout the year.

RAKE LEAVES UNDER SHRUBS to create mulch and natural feeding areas for ground-feeding birds such as sparrows, towhees, and thrashers. Earthworms, pill bugs, insects, and spiders will thrive in the decomposing leaf mulch, and will in turn be readily eaten by many songbirds. In general, overly tidy gardeners are poor bird gardeners!

REDUCE YOUR LAWN BY AT LEAST 25% to favor meadow plants and taller grasses. Tall grasses provide seeds and nesting places for birds. Cut this meadow just once each year, and let the remainder of the lawn grow 3 to 4 inches tall before cutting. Take the “healthy yard pledge” to avoid lawn pesticides and wasteful sprinklers www.audubonathome.org/pledge. Currently, 50 percent of U.S. households treat their lawns with chemicals that kill about 7 million birds each year. These chemicals also leach into our groundwater where they move to wells, streams, lakes, and oceans.

CLEAN OUT OLD BIRD AND MOUSE NESTS from nest boxes in early spring. When setting out new nest boxes, consider the preferred habitat for different species, as well as the size of the entrance hole, and its distance above the ground. Face boxes to the east in northern latitudes to provide extra warmth. In forests, play “woodpecker” by using a power drill to create 1 ¼-inch holes into dead snags 4 to 5 feet off the ground. These holes will serve as nest cavity starts for chickadees and titmice.

CLEAN TUBE FEEDERS with a bottle brush and a 10% solution of non-chlorine bleach solution. Rinse thoroughly and dry in the sun before refilling. Rake up soggy seed from under feeders that could grow deadly mold. Move feeders close to the house to avoid window strikes. Collisions with windows may kill as many as a billion birds in the United States each year. Birds at feeders that are spooked by a hawk or other predator will scatter in all directions. Move feeders within three feet of a window. At such close distances, birds are less likely to gather lethal momentum when startled. The birds will be safer, and you’ll get a better view!

KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS for the safety of both the birds and your cat. There are about 100 million pet and stray cats in the United States. They kill hundreds of millions of birds each year—especially in the spring when young songbirds are fledging, often on or near the ground. And cats themselves are safer from collisions with cars, predators, diseases, and parasites when kept indoors.