

THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark



BIRDS: TINY BUT MIGHTY

In these deep, dark days of winter, it is easy enough to curl up under a blanket, grab a good book and try to forget about the bitter cold just outside our door but birds don't have that luxury. Birds that overwinter in Illinois still need to eat and drink, they need a place to rest, and are out 'playing' with friends. While these feathered friends go about trying to survive winter, we often have the pleasure of being able to enjoy their brilliant colors, curious activity, and quick flight at the slightest hint of danger. In the sparkle of a new fallen snow, they seem almost magical and bring many of us such joy.

As Outsiders, we can do our part to support the life cycle of these curious creatures and help support their populations. The most immediate action we can take is to install a water and food source this winter. A wide variety of feeders and foods are available at local garden centers and stores. The type of feeder and food you supply will impact the bird species supported in your landscape. During the warmer months, most song birds consume a diverse diet of seeds and insects. During winter months, nonmigratory birds subsist on fruits and seeds. The variety of seeds provided during winter months will influence the species of birds that are attracted to your yard. Black-oil sunflower seeds appeal to the most species of birds and are a source of high-quality nutrition. Sunflower seeds are often favored so much that other seeds in a standard mix are left uneaten. Millet is available in red and white varieties and is enjoyed by Finches, Sparrows, and Doves. Safflower is a favorite of Cardinals, Finches, Chickadees, Titmice and Nuthatches. Experiment with seed mixes and feeding systems to attract your favorite feathered friends.



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KEEP IT CLEAN

As we work to increase the population of birds in our yard, we must also take actions to protect the creatures we are working hard to attract. Bird feeders are a great source of nutrition, but they can also be an efficient way for disease to spread among populations. Feeders should be cleaned at least every other week. Start by discarding any leftover food (don't dump it on the ground nearby, it could attract pests). Scrub feeders with a mix of soap and water before soaking in a 1:1 solution of vinegar water for 15 minutes. Rinse and let dry completely before refilling with food.

Hummingbird feeders require a little more maintenance since the sugary solution is more conducive for growing bacteria. Wash hummingbird feeders every few days; scrub and soak in a water and vinegar solution is recommended as a best practice. Keep in mind that Hummingbirds are migratory and these feeders are not necessary in winter months.



A BIRD'S BUFFET

Placement of bird feeders is equally as important as cleaning practices for keeping our feathered visitors healthy and safe. It is estimated that approximately one billion birds are injured or killed by collisions with glass windows each year. Locating bird feeders at least 30 feet away from windows or very close to them help reduce risk of impact injury. Between these distances, it has been observed that window reflections can cause confusion and increase the instances of impact. An alternative is to apply treatments that make windows more visible to birds.

Additionally, locate feeders in areas they are likely to stay dry but are out of direct sunlight. Placing feeders near shrubs or trees will provide a quick escape route from predators.

During hot, humid months of summer, it is obvious that birds enjoy a bath as much as any animal species but water is a critical resource during winter months too. Providing clean, fresh water is a lifesaver during the frozen, dry days of winter. Bird baths can be kept in use throughout the winter months with an immersion water heater, or heated bowl. Choose a location that minimizes the risk of plant debris or animal feces from falling inside (such as under a bird feeder). Keep the water fresh and clean the entire bird bath every few weeks.



"Animals don't lie. Animals don't criticize. If animals have moody days, they handle them better than humans do."

— Betty White



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WINTER IS ROUGH ENOUGH

In addition to providing food and water, reducing predation can help attract birds to your yard. Outdoor cats are non-native predators that kill an estimated 1.5 to four billion birds in the United States each year. When possible, it is best for bird populations to keep cats indoors. In addition to our feline friends, keep backyard chickens away from bird feeding areas too. Avian diseases can be spread between populations of wild birds and backyard birds.

PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

As we long for the warm summer sun to return so that hibernation can cease and we can get back into the garden, take a few minutes this winter to observe opportunities for bird habitat improvement. Where are the areas of the landscape that lack nesting site potential and need shrubs or trees incorporated? Did you leave seed heads of native plants in the landscape for winter food? Do you want to incorporate more native plants in your yard this coming year? If yes, spend some time researching which plants are best suited to achieve your goals. Native plant species will provide the most food and habitat resource available to wildlife species. Below are a few of options to consider along with the bird species they may attract.



"The woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those who sang the best."

— John James Audubon

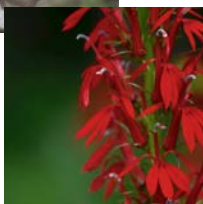
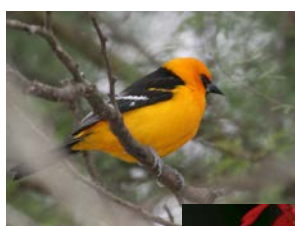
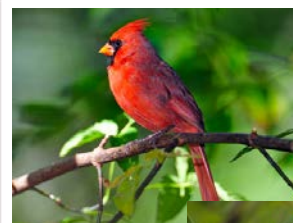


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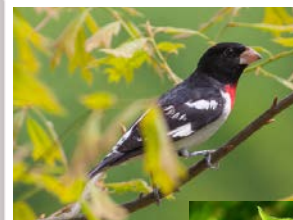
PLANTS TO ATTRACT BIRDS

Shrubs	Thrushes	Waxwings	Sparrows	Chickadees	Nuthatch	Titmice	Cardinals	Grosbeaks	Wrens	Orioles	Woodpeckers	Vireos
American Witch-hazel (<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>)		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Chokecherry (<i>Prunus virginiana</i>)	●		●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●
Cockspur Hawthorn (<i>Crateagus crusgalli</i>)	●	●	●				●	●	●			●
Common Buttonbush (<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>)	●		●				●	●	●	●		



Grasses and Flowers	Thrushes	Waxwings	Oriole	Chickadees	Nuthatch	Titmice	Cardinals	Grosbeaks	Wrens	Jays	Finches	Waxwings
Butterfly Milkweed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)		●	●	●		●	●	●			●	●
Cardinal Flower (<i>Labelia cardinalis</i>)			●		●		●	●		●		
Foxglove Beardtongue (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>)			●	●	●	●	●	●				
Little Bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	●			●	●	●			●	●	●	

Trees	Thrushes	Waxwings	Sparrows	Chickadees	Nuthatch	Titmice	Cardinals	Grosbeaks	Wrens	Jays	Woodpeckers	Vireos
American Basswood (<i>Tilia americana</i>)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
American Hornbeam (<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>)	●	●		●	●	●	●	●				
American Plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>)	●		●		●				●	●		●
Black Cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)			●		●				●	●	●	●



OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider

- Visit [Icestravagana](#) Jan 14-16 in downtown Davenport, IA. See beautiful ice carvings like your favorite zoo animals carved out of ice!
- Explore the vast world of ornithology by visiting [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

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Emily Swihart, Horticulture Educator
Tracy Jo Mulliken, Program Coordinator

321 West 2nd Avenue, Milan, IL 61264
(309) 756-9978
Email: ESwihart@illinois.edu