

Birdsong

It seems to be a basic human instinct to be attracted to the sounds of birds in one's surroundings. Birdsong imparts a feeling of tranquility that touches you deep in your soul. But songbirds offer much more than comforting background music. They are one of nature's best pest control experts. By encouraging songbirds to your garden, you invite voracious insectivores to keep bug levels in check thus avoiding the need for insecticides. As it turns out, songbirds need our help as an increasingly human impacted world offers fewer and fewer refuges for their survival. You don't need to be a birder to successfully attract songbirds to your garden. Plant the right plants, add a water feature and they will come.

Songbirds need four basic elements to inhabit an area: food, water, shelter and nest building materials. Other than water, plants can provide the rest either directly or indirectly. Songbirds as a group feed on insects and other small creature like worms, seeds, berries and nuts. Native plants as a whole provide these food sources best. Have all three plant layers in your garden: trees, shrubs and a ground layer of flowers and groundcovers. Trees like oaks, birch, cherries and eastern red cedar are good choices. Shrubs and vines are extremely important for shelter, nesting sites and berry and insect food sources. Top shrubs and vines include: myrica, viburnum, lindera, sambucus, rhus, ilex, aronia, rubus, vitis, callicarpa, cornus, vaccinium, parthenocissus, lonicera, cephalanthus, rosa, itea. The ground layer is also important for shelter, nesting sites and seed, berry and insect food sources. Top ground layer plants include: helianthus, echinacea, solidago, liatris, verbascum, eupatorium, chamaecrista, rudbeckia, coreopsis, aster, phlox, opuntia, fragaria, iris, dennstaedtia, boltonia, agastache, mertensia, dicentra, podophyllum, arctostaphylos, hibiscus and grasses including panicum, andropogon, schizachyrium, sorghastrum and typha. When planted densely, the shrub and ground layers offer maximal opportunities. Lastly, don't cut back your herbaceous plants in the fall. Wait until early spring. You will be amazed at the bird activity on those seed heads!

Knowing the aesthetic qualities of the above mentioned plants, I think you will agree that a garden for songbirds can be a garden of great beauty too!