

Attracting birds to your garden is easy! It doesn't matter if you live on a farm or in an apartment, in the country or in a city—anyone can attract birds to their property given a little pleasurable work and some ingenuity.

TEN SECRETS TO MAKING YOUR GARDEN BIRD-FRIENDLY



#1 Start by thinking like a bird!

A Birder's Garden needs:

- Food and water
- Shelter (from weather and predators)
- Nesting opportunities

#2 Use three levels of vegetation to blend great design with great bird habitat

A mixed environment will please both birds and people. Incorporating plants at three levels—a mixed environment—will provide all the above requirements to make it attractive to birds. At the same time, it will automatically incorporate the elements of good design needed to create an attractive garden.

#3 Start with a base of low to the ground design elements

As in life, it's ok to start at the bottom in the garden! The following ground-level staples of garden design serve several important functions:

- **Ground cover plants** – All birds need somewhere to skulk when life seems threatening and a place to find tasty food such as insects and seeds.
- **Logs and rocks** – Add rocks to provide a place to perch. Stack old firewood to simulate fallen trees. A pile of logs is essential in a wildlife garden.

- **Lawns** –Robins and Flickers rather like grass – so do Juncos and the odd Sparrow but most birds feel very exposed out there. Some grass is fine, but not too much and don't cut it shorter than necessary.

#4 Add a mid-level layer of shrubs and bushes

Shrubs provide beauty as well as food and shelter for the birds. Not just beautiful to look at, they also provide your feathered garden visitors a perch to look about from and shelter from inclement weather. Use plant species that start the year covered in flowers and end it with a crop of berries that provide food.

#5 Look up – way up... add height with trees

Trees add beauty to please the gardener and offer built-in features that will make the birds happy too! Even small young trees will make your garden more attractive to birds and over the years will mature into something of beauty. So go out and plant some trees this season! Trees provide places to nest, to eat, sing and be seen. Different species build nests at different heights, so a nicely wooded lot will make your garden appealing to a variety of birds.

#6 Give yourself a break and don't be too tidy!

Birds love a messy garden, and nothing says "welcome" like an old log. Really! Scruffy corners are highly desirable. Birds do not especially like "tidy" gardens so leave piles of leaves and twigs, especially during the winter. In woodlands, fallen wood occurs naturally and many species have adapted to use this habitat. The nooks and crannies of old logs shelter insects and in turn attract foraging birds. Plenty of wildlife makes its home in dead wood and use it as a source of food. You can usually find somewhere to put a pile of old logs or firewood, even in the smallest backyard. Place your old logs in a shady spot, so that it remains cool and damp. Leave a corner unraked in the fall to promote insect life and shelter for small rodents. Do not cut the heads of seed-bearing flowers before winter. Birds will feed on these seeds during the winter months.

#7 Don't forget the importance of shelter. Birds need to feel safe!

Gimme shelter, If I don't get some shelter, I'm gonna fade away...

With apologies to the Rolling Stones, the lyrics above certainly help underscore the importance of adding shelter to your garden environment. Birds won't visit if they don't feel safe! Add some sheltering elements though, and you'll have them singing your praises from the tree-tops soon enough! (The birds that is, not the Rolling Stones!)

Remember, wide-open spaces may look fine to a gardener and mirror the designs in the glossy magazines, but they terrify birds. They know that there are lots of things out there, from cats to birds of prey, just itching to eat them! Shelter comes in many forms, be it a low-level hedge, a pile of brush, an old tree stump or a majestic oak tree. If it can provide a place to perch or to hide, it will be a welcome haven for your feathered visitors.

#8 Provide birds with a choice of feeder and food types

We all need choices – even the birds! Different species like different ways to have their food presented so offer a variety of feeder and seed types. Wrong seed types = no birds. Include tray or ground feeders, hopper feeders and tube feeders for large and small seeds.

#9 Provide a range of wild or natural foods

Variety is the spice of life ... and another secret to a great bird garden! Your plants don't just have to attract birds directly; they can also attract creatures that birds like to eat. Insects, worms, larvae,

eggs, rodents and other birds are all potential food sources that will attract birds to your garden. Add plants that provide seeds, berries, nectar, fruit, nuts and buds for abundant variety.

#10 Just add water – the key ingredient in any birder's garden

A water feature is a sure-fire way to attract birds to your yard. Nothing else that you place in your garden will have such an effect on the number of species you see as will a puddle of water. From rain filling that little dip in your lawn to an elaborate pond, water is a bird magnet.

Moving water is a must-have feature to increase the range of species you are likely to see in your garden. No room for a pond? In a small garden or on an apartment balcony a container of water such as an inverted garbage can lid or a bucket will draw birds to it, especially if they can access the water by perching on the rim or on stones or twigs placed inside of it. Even just a dripping tap or a slow trickle from the end of a hose can increase your bird “catch rate” tenfold.

Bird baths are readily available at a price point to please everyone. There is nothing quite so easily able to bring you joy as watching a bird splash about in water. Easy to acquire and set up, purchasing a bird bath adds instant beauty and bird-appeal to your yard. If you are able to do only one thing to attract more birds, a bird bath may be the easiest option.

Bonus #11 – Enjoy your garden!

You're not quite finished—but all that's left is to add a comfortable spot to sit and watch and/or to photograph the birds from. Then pour yourself a drink and relax! After all that hard work you deserve it.



Thanks to BPQ member and past president Richard Gregson for providing this helpful information. You can visit him at <https://1001species.substack.com/> to read his musings about not only birds, but plants, wildlife and more.