

Landscaping for Birds

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Many of us would like to include the viewing of a variety of birds to the enjoyment of our yards. We can bring some species to our yards by putting up feeders and adding a birdbath and bird houses. But homeowners can provide a far more valuable service to their local songbirds. By landscaping their yards with a variety of plants, they can create a breeding habitat. Because of the degrading of much of the birds' natural habitat, many species are declining in number.

Birds need plants for food, nesting and cover. They also need a water source. Select plants that provide nectar, seeds and fruits in all the seasons of the year. Here in the Sandhills we can create an understory in our tall growing pines. Try to use as many native plants as you can. Birds have evolved a long relationship with native plant species. Also, growing native plants may mean your garden will need less maintenance and water.

Evergreen plants are invaluable for nesting and cover.

Think about landscaping in layers. Low shrubs in front of taller shrubs provide extra protection from predators. Beside shrub edges can be berry producing ground covers, grasses, perennials and annuals.

And remember, vines don't take up much space when climbing on trellis, arbor, a tall pine or meandering through some shrubs. A fun idea for a neighborhood is for homeowners to create a network of bird friendly backyards by having connected habitat patches.

An important thing to think about when landscaping your yard is future availability of water for irrigation. More and more we will be asked to conserve. Try to plant varieties with similar water needs together.

Then a grouping of moisture loving plants will be the only area that needs irrigation. Better still, confine plantings of moisture lovers to low parts of the yard or at the edges of streams or an existing natural pond.

Start with a landscape plan. It doesn't have to be anything very technical. If you know where you might want a pond in the future, you will not have planted a tree or large shrub in that location. A good place for a pond is where you can see it from inside the house as well as from an outside sitting area. Your

landscape can progress in stages. As you plant, more birds will come to your yard. If you want to start a shrubby privacy screen, try for a natural looking border with a variety of bird friendly trees and shrubs.

You might want to get the taller or slower growing plants in the ground the first year. Last but not least, try to avoid the use of insecticides.

