GARDENING FOR BIRDS

Tallgrass Prairie


Western Kingbird


Swamp Sparrow


Dark-eyed Junco

Why should you garden for birds?

Our natural landscapes have been changed dramatically by human activity. With increasing urbanization, development, and industrial pressure, we are losing and fragmenting the habitat that wildlife, including birds, need to survive. What's exciting is that you can use your yard or property to help bring back habitat for birds.

Gardening is an excellent way to have your property become a home for birds and other wildlife. By providing food, water, and shelter, you can help birds thrive throughout the year. Some bird species that visit your garden may be migrants, stopping by on their flights to and from northern Canada. Others may be year-round residents, winter visitors, or local breeders. By providing a place for them to refuel, nest, forage, or simply rest, you can help birds in all sorts of ways.

This factsheet provides some ideas for plants to include in your garden to help birds. It is tailored to your specific region – what we are calling your "Bird Garden Zone." Bird Garden Zones combine factors like major habitat types, geography, and climate to help you determine the best plants to use in your area to help birds.

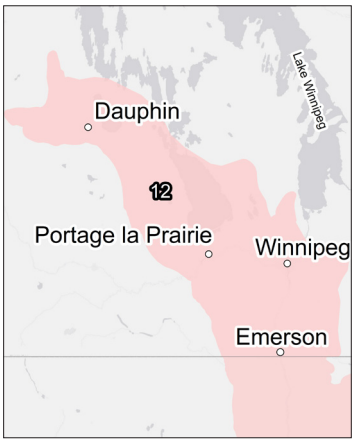
You can find more information about helping birds and creating a custom garden plant list by visiting BirdGardens.ca.

What should you consider when gardening for birds?

When creating a plan for your garden, think about designing a space that provides birds with crucial, life-saving resources year-round – think food, water, and shelter. Incorporate native species (trees, shrubs, herbs, and vines that naturally occur in your region) into your existing garden and increase the structural diversity of your yard. Areas with dense shrubs can be complemented by more open areas. Taller or more hidden perching or nesting spots in trees can provide safety from predators. Water features can give birds a chance to rehydrate or bathe. Try to provide different food sources, such as seeds and berries, or flowers that attract insects. Think about what your garden can offer in each season, whether it's shelter during spring migration or food sources in the fall and winter. You might even work with your neighbours to make your local habitat patch as large as possible!

Tallgrass Prairie (Zone 12)

Gently rolling hills with steeper slopes along major waterways characterize this zone. Historically, tallgrass prairie and bur oak parklands were common, but human development and extensive agriculture now dominate. River valleys and areas with higher soil moisture support woodlands. Drier areas to the west transition to mixed-grass prairie.



Tallgrass Prairie

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What to Plant in Zone 12

This table is meant to provide only general information about plant characteristics. Some plants may tolerate different soil types and conditions. Please consult a local native plant nursery or visit BirdGardens.ca for more species-specific information.

Common Name (Botanical Name)	Plant Type	Sun	Soil	Moisture	Bird Features
Jack Pine *(Pinus banksiana)*	evergreen tree	full sun	Flexible	dry	cones/cone-like structures
White Spruce *(Picea glauca)*	evergreen tree	full sun	Flexible	Flexible	cones/cone-like structures
American Basswood or Linden *(Tilia americana)*	deciduous tree	part sun/shade	Flexible	well-drained/moist	nuts/large seeds, nectar/pollinators
Bur Oak *(Quercus macrocarpa)*	deciduous tree	full sun	Flexible	well-drained/moist	nuts/large seeds
Pussy Willow *(Salix discolor)*	shrub	full sun	Flexible	wet	nectar/pollinators
Stiff Goldenrod *(Solidago rigida)*	herbaceous	full sun	Flexible	dry	small seeds, nectar/pollinators
Brown-eyed Susan *(Rudbeckia hirta)*	herbaceous	full sun	Flexible	well-drained/moist	small seeds, nectar/pollinators
Blazing Star *(Liatris ligulistylis)*	herbaceous	full sun	Flexible	well-drained/moist	small seeds, nectar/pollinators
Blue Vervain *(Verbena hastata)*	herbaceous	full sun	Flexible	Flexible	small seeds, nectar/pollinators
Big Bluestem *(Andropogon gerardii)*	herbaceous	shade	Flexible	well-drained/moist	small seeds

Legend

- deciduous tree
- evergreen tree
- shrub
- herbaceous
- full sun
- part sun/shade
- shade
- wet
- well-drained/moist
- dry
- cones/cone-like structures
- small seeds
- berries/drupes
- nectar/pollinators
- nuts/large seeds

Birds You Might See

Western Meadowlark *(Sturnella neglecta)*

This conspicuous member of the blackbird family can often be seen perched atop shrubs, singing its flutelike song. Western Meadowlarks nest on the ground, so try incorporating a variety of native herbaceous species in your garden to provide areas of dense ground cover for shelter.

Pine Siskin *(Spinus pinus)*

The chatter of this noisy finch may alert you to the presence of a flock before you see them! These seed-eaters can often be found visiting bird feeders, but planting native, seed-producing species may also entice them to fuel up at your garden.

Visit BirdGardens.ca for a comprehensive 'gardening for birds' toolkit, including a full list of recommended species to plant to help birds!

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Birds Canada's mission is to conserve wild birds through sound science, on-the-ground actions, innovative partnerships, public engagement, and science-based advocacy.

P.O. Box 160, 115 Front Road, Port Rowan, Ontario, N0E 1M0
519-586-3531 | 1-888-448-BIRD (2473)

Photography by Daniel Arndt