

Gardening for Birds using Florida Native Plants

To attract birds to your yard, think about creating a habitat with food, shelter, and water to meet the needs of both nesting and migratory birds. Building an ecosystem rich with plant and animal life will attract a variety of birds throughout the year.

Migration occurs in spring and fall. Birds need calorie-dense foods, like seeds and berries, as they travel hundreds or thousands of miles.

Nesting birds are those that breed and raise their young locally. Growing babies need huge amounts of protein in the form of insects. Birds can make hundreds of trips back to the nest per day to feed their growing nestlings.

Food

To feed migratory birds, use plants that provide seeds, nuts, or berries. Birds migrate north through Florida late April to early May. Fall migration stretches from August through October. Having a variety of plants that flower and fruit throughout the year ensures migrating birds will find something to eat in your yard. Stoppers and viburnums are excellent foundation shrubs that also provide fruit for birds like Cedar Waxwings and tanagers. Grasses are an important group of plants for small, seed-eating birds like finches and buntings.

Any flowering plant that attracts pollinators will help support nesting birds. Parent birds will bring the insects found on your plants back to the nest. Be sure to leave some of the "dead" flowers so that seeds can develop to feed birds later in the season.

Oaks are a key group of plants for both migratory and nesting birds. They support nearly 1,000 species of moth and butterfly caterpillars. Those Oak Rollers that hang down and get in your hair? They help make up the base of the food chain that supports birds. Leave the leaf litter below your oak because that is where the caterpillars pupate.



Northern Parula eating a caterpillar



House Wren taking a cricket to the nest



Blue Jay with acorns

Shelter

In order to feel safe, birds need to be able to retreat from open spaces where they may be foraging or drinking. Providing layers of low groundcovers, grasses, shrubs, and trees will give birds a wide variety of places to hide from predators. Vary the density of plants to add interest to your landscape while supporting the nesting preferences of different types of birds. Some birds, like Catbirds and Carolina Wrens, prefer thick shrubbery. Others, like the Great-crested Flycatcher, need more open branching so they can launch to catch flying insects



Mature Sand Live Oak

Water

Provide at least 2 sources of water in your garden for birds to drink and bathe. Bird baths should be shallow with a textured surface. Add fresh water frequently so the birds know they have a reliable source in your yard. Once they are in the habit of using your baths, birds will often wait nearby for a bath when you get the hose out!

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Shrubs



American Beautyberry



Seagrape

| Plant | Moisture, Sun, Growth Habit, notes |
|---------------------|---|
| Simpson's Stopper | Average, shade-full sun, † 15-20', ↔ 10-15', red berries |
| Coffee species | Average-Dry, shade, size varies by species, red berries |
| Horizontal Cocoplum | Dry-Very Dry, Full sun † 10-15', ↔ 10-15', salt tolerant |
| Yaupon Holly | Moist-Dry, size varies based on cultivar, Only female fruit |
| Red-Tipped Cocoplum | Dry- Very Dry, Full sun † 10-15', ↔ 10', salt tolerant |
| Sea Grape | Average-Very Dry, † 15-30', ↔ 10-30', salt tolerant |
| Spanish Stopper | Average-Dry, † 12-15', ↔ 6-12', good for narrow spaces |
| Wax Myrtle | Moist-Dry, † 15-20', ↔ 10-15', fast growing |
| Beautyberry | Moist-Dry, † 5-10', ↔ 3-10', purple berries, shade tolerant |

Trees

| Plant | Moisture, Sun, Growth Habit, notes |
|--------------------|---|
| Dahoon Holly | Moist-Average, † 20-30', ↔ 10-15', winter berries |
| Red Mulberry | Moist-Dry, † 20-30', ↔ 10-15', pollinators, prolific fruit |
| Sand Live Oak | Dry-Very Dry, † 30-40', ↔ 20-40', acorns, caterpillars |
| Southern Live Oak | Moist-Avg, † 60-80', ↔ 60-100'+, acorns, caterpillars |
| Winged Elm | Avg-Dry, † 40-70', ↔ 30-40', nesting, interesting bark |
| Elderberry | Moist, part-full sun † 10-15', ↔ 10', fragrant flowers, fruit |
| Southern Red Cedar | Avg-Dry, Part-full sun, † 25-45', ↔ 20-30', fruit |
| American Sycamore | Moist-avg, full sun, † 75'+, ↔ 50'+, Hosts 40+ caterpillars |



Winged Elm

Wildflowers, Groundcovers, and Grasses



Painted Bunting eating grass seeds

| Plant | Moisture, Sun, Growth Habit, notes |
|---------------------|---|
| Tickseed spp | Size and conditions vary, pollinators, seeds |
| Tropical Sage | Avg- Very Dry, Shade-full sun, † 3-5', ↔ 1-3', pollinators |
| Creeping Sage | Avg-dry, shade- part sun, † 1', ↔ 4-5', pollinators, host |
| Muhly Grass | Moist-dry, full-part sun, † 3', ↔ 3-4', seeds, cover |
| Lovegrass | Purple or Elliot's, † 2', ↔ 3', seeds, cover |
| Matchweed/Frogfruit | Moist-Dry, part shade-full sun, † 6", host plant, low cover |