

IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE PLANTING

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What is all the hub-bub about native plants these days? Native plants work well with the area wildlife to supply food and shelter, attract insects that native species eat, or produce the nectar that native wildlife or pollinators desire. Native plants and wildlife coexist in a balance that is upset by non-native plants or insects that do not have enough natural enemies to keep them in check. In this issue, we will look at the best native trees and shrubs for our area. This is not the complete list by any means, but a good place to start getting ideas. Our thanks go to Joy Cirigliano, our November 2018 speaker, for sharing this extensive information with us.

TREES

North American Oaks– grow to 40-80 feet at maturity, which can take decades. Oaks have attractive bark and lobed leaves. They are the #1 wildlife trees in the Northeast. Spring bloom time coincides with warbler migration. The hungry birds keep caterpillars in check. Acorns provide birds and wildlife food. The leaves keep the soil acid.

Black, Pin, Choke Cherry– Black Cherry is a slow grower to 40 -60 feet; Pin Cherry grows quickly but is not long lived (20 -30 years). Choke Cherry is small (16 feet). All produce spring flowers which pollinators nectar on and small cherries that birds eat in summertime. Birds and other animals eat the caterpillars.

Grey, Black, River Birch– medium height trees attractive when planted in groups. They have serrated leaves and attractive bark. They provide caterpillars and seed enjoyed by chickadees, redpolls and other small songbirds.

American Beech– slow growing to 50-80 feet. Smooth silvery bark and branches that start low to the ground. They provide caterpillars and nutlets that attract many types of wildlife.

White Spruce – pyramidal shaped evergreen, moderate height. The cones produce seeds for many species of birds and wildlife. It is good shelter, protection and nesting areas. It provides insects in the summer and winter.

Winterberry Holly, Inkberry – Winterberry Holly is a large shrub or small tree that drops its leaves in fall. Birds enjoy the red berries all winter. Favorite of waxwings and robins. Inkberry is an evergreen that provides shelter year-round. Birds will eat it when other food is scarce. Nectar source for pollinators and protein source from insects.

Dogwoods – small trees that have flowers that attract pollinators in the spring and berries in the fall for birds and wildlife.

American Red Cedar 40 – 60 ft. with evergreen scales and short needles. Female produces juicy berry-like cones that waxwings and other wildlife love. Excellent cover and nesting site.

Blueberries - Highbush (6 – 10 feet) and Lowbush (2 feet)- White bell flowers for pollinators and wonderful summer fruit. It's exciting to think that each of us can make a difference in a small way in our own yards. The choice to plant native vs. exotic plants may seem insignificant, but it really does make a difference to the world habitat. In this final article on native plantings, we are going to look at grasses.

FLOWERING PLANTS

My garden has flowers all season, pollinator plants and plants that generate both shelter and food for birds. But I still study these catalogs and invariably buy something – mostly because I want everything.

Goldenrod – generally invasive but excellent for wildlife. They generate lots of insect protein for birds and the blooms attract many different pollinators. Birds and small mammals also eat seeds. Some varieties are non-invasive and for shadier areas. Others can be kept in control by planting in a bottomless container with the lip above the soil line. 2'-4', sun to part shade.

Aster – Great source of nectar for late summer; good seed source for finches and other small songbirds; insect larval food source. 2'-5', full sun

Purple Coneflower – late summer bloomer with cone shaped seed heads that Goldfinch love; flowers attract butterflies and other pollinators. Leaves are host to several insects. 18" – 4', sun to part shade.

Sunflower – bees and butterflies enjoy them and then they produce seeds that the birds love. Easy to grow annuals – make sure you plant old fashioned, not new sterile cultivars. 3' – 12'

Pyeweed – white to lilac fuzzy topped clusters that bees and other beneficial insects love, leaves are used by insects; in winter chickadees and woodpeckers pick at the hollow stems looking for insects 18" – 6', sun to part shade.

Black-eyed Susan – attract insects to their leaves and birds to their seeds. Good for rain gardens. 1'-6', sun to part shade

Tickseeds (*coreopsis*, *verticillata* and *grandiflora*) – long blooming yellow, orange and red daisy like blooms; beneficial insects and birds love the flowers and seeds. 8" – 24" sun to part shade.

Bee Balm – Monarda – aromatic leaves and tubular blooms that hummingbirds and bees love, but deer don't. 3'-4', full sun.

Milkweed & Butterfly Weed – very fragrant and extremely important to Monarch butterflies, pollinators nectar on the blooms. Several varieties, some can be invasive.

Blazing Star – Liatris – purple spikes of bloom attract bees and other insects. Birds enjoy the seeds and stalks attract woodpeckers and other insect eater in fall and winter. 2'-4'.

GRASSES

I have never really been excited about grasses, but I think I may have missed something. In the days before I became familiar with native plants, one of the things I minded about grasses was that they could be invasive. And I always more or less fancied an old-fashioned flower garden. As my yard has purposely turned more bird

and wildlife friendly, I now appreciate what grasses have to offer. Here are a few native grasses that you might want to add to your yard:

Panic or Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) - Offers good cover and nesting sites for grassland birds. Birds and small mammals eat the seed. Butterfly and moth larvae as well as grasshoppers eat the leaves. This works out well as most birds and many mammals eat the insects that eat the grass. 3-6', sun to light shade.

Virginia and Blue Wild Rye - Attractive clump grasses with nodding seed heads that birds and small mammals love. Grasshoppers, caterpillars and other insects use the leaves and field birds will nest in larger clumps. 3-4', full sun.

Little Bluestem - Attractive clumping grass with narrow blue-green blades. In fall it turns reddish gold and the color persists through the winter. It is a good butterfly and moth host plant. Grassland birds like the seeds and nest in larger clumps. 2-3', sun to part shade.

Hopefully these articles have been helpful and offer some ideas to make your yard a yard that is for the birds. Be sure to use the National Audubon Society's Native Plant Database. Visit: [Audubon.org/native-plants](https://www.audubon.org/native-plants)