

Planting for Birds

One of the great joys of gardening is to share a garden with wildlife, especially birds. Attracting birds to a garden is made easier by following a few basic guidelines. All birds depend on plants for shelter, nest and roosting sites, and food. To the extent that your yard offers some or all of these features it can become a haven for birdlife.

As a general rule, the more native plants in the yard, the more birds. This is especially true of cactus wren, verdin, and quail. Some birds are so particular you must have the special plant which they demand, such as phainopepla and mesquite. Others such as mockingbird, house finches, doves, orioles and hummingbirds only demand that you provide their basic needs.

SHELTER: Most birds require some shelter for roosting, preening, and sleeping. By varying the height as well as density of plants a greater number of species are encouraged to seek out shelter in your yard. Having good shelter mixed with open ground provides the security necessary for ground feeding birds such as doves, thrashers and quail. Good plants for shelter are: Arizona rosewood (*Vauquelinia californica*), hopbush (*Dodonaea viscosa*), four wing salt bush (*Atriplex canescens*), and Texas ranger (*Leucophyllum* spp.).

NESTING: Nesting requirements in birds are quite varied. To encourage as many different types of birds as possible, vary the types of plants, use a number of natives, and vary the height of plants. A few birds are extremely particular; cactus wren use cholla almost exclusively to nest, verdin use palo verde almost exclusively, and orioles want very high trees that are not crowded. Good plants for nesting, in addition to the ones listed under shelter are: mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), palo verde (*Cercidium floridum* or *C. microphyllum*), cholla cactus (*Opuntia fulgida*, *O. acanthocarpa* and others), palms (*Washingtonia filifera*) and pyracantha.

FOOD: Birds eat seed, fruit, or nectar, as well as insects found on plants. Again, diversity encourages more birds, particularly plants that bloom in different seasons. Hummingbirds are particularly fond, as are orioles and finches, of tubular blooms with lots of nectar. Good plants for bird food in addition to those already listed are: saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*), hackberry (*Celtis pallida*), quail bush (*Atriplex lentiformis*), creosote (*Larrea tridentata*), chuparosa (*Justicia californica*), penstemon (*Penstemon* spp.), salvia (*Salvia* spp.), wolfberry (*Lycium fremontii*, *L. exertum*), hummingbird bush (*Justicia spicigera*, *J. ovata*), red fairyduster (*Calliandra californica*), ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*), aloes, prickly pear cactus, and yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*).

WATER: One of the surest ways to encourage birds in a yard, especially a new yard, is to provide water. If you do not have pets or wandering cats, provide water on the ground, in an open spot. Most birds love to bathe and drink at this level, but are wary, and want a perch nearby, but not overhanging the water. If you have pets or wandering cats, move the water higher, beyond their reach. Leave the water in the open, with no overhanging branches. Change the water often, especially in the warm weather, and remove algae buildup with a scrub brush rather than chemical treatments.