

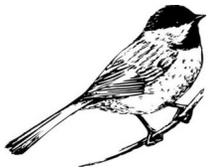
Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mgghelp@masshort.org.

Bird Gardens—Plants and Food



A basic rule of gardening works for both plants and birds. “Right plant, right place” becomes “Right plant, right bird” in your bird garden. A habitat that mimics nature will provide the birds with their basic needs: food, water, a safe place to live (protected from predators and harsh weather) and a place to nest. Diversity in plant selection is key. Plant layers -- ground covers, understory plants, shrubs and larger trees.

Fruit eaters such as catbirds, waxwings, grosbeaks, mockingbirds, robins, and orioles enjoy blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and grapes which provide fruit at staggered times. Birds will also eat the berries of dogwoods, mulberries, hawthorn, and quince. Winter fruit can be provided by winterberry, holly, ivy, chokecherry, magnolias and service berry. Some woodland groundcovers and vines such as poison ivy and Virginia creeper provide berries as well as providing shelter, nesting spots and cover.

True seed-eating birds such as jays, cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches, towhees, and doves eat the seeds of maples, alders, birch, and many others. During the early to late summer months, asters, coneflowers, coreopsis, salvia and sedum are examples of perennials that provide seeds and nectar sources. Leaving the seed heads and standing foliage, such as grasses, in the garden provide food and shelter in the winter.

Nectar sippers such as hummingbirds, wrens, orioles, and tanagers are attracted by any plant that holds nectar. Honeysuckle, cardinal flower, butterfly bush, monarda, foxglove and phlox are examples of nectar-bearing plants that are attractive as well. Many nectar drinkers will also visit flowering shrubs, vines and trees to nest and seek shelter.

Evergreens, large or small, provide year round cover from predators and bad weather as well as food.

Provide shallow basins of water for drinking and bathing,

and avoid the use of pesticides and poisons.

During the cold winter nights, many birds can lose up to 15% of their body weight in one night trying to stay warm. When all of the natural food sources in your garden have vanished for the winter, supplement the birds’ food source. Black oil sunflower seeds (much healthier than the black striped ones) will attract cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches, titmice, jays, finches and grosbeaks. Nyjer/thistle seed attracts finches, but use a tube feeder with small holes.

Millet is a favorite of ground-feeding birds, especially doves, sparrows, juncos, towhees and cardinals. Suet is very popular with woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, titmice, robins, and warblers. Woodpeckers, jays, nuthatches, chickadees and titmice will readily visit a peanut feeder (de-shelled and unsalted). Peanuts are a source of high protein and energy. Orioles, finches and some woodpeckers also enjoy halved apples and oranges. Raisins soaked in water will attract mockingbirds and catbirds. Cracked corn will attract sparrows, blackbirds, jays, doves, quail (and squirrels!).

Good mixed seed has a large amount of sunflower seed, cracked corn, white proso millet, and perhaps some peanut hearts.

Keep cats inside if possible. Warblers, thrushes and whip-poor-wills are some of the birds that nest on the ground making them easy prey.



The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>