

Winter Birds

The Pacific Northwest is home to a multitude of non-migratory birds. In winter, with diminished sources for food, you may consider providing birds the essentials for survival. You can also provide those needs by creating a bird friendly habitat in your garden. In return, birds will give you untold hours of entertainment by allowing you a "birds' eye view" of their lives!

Garden Basics for Birdscapes

There are only a few criteria to attract birds to your garden. Follow one or more of these guidelines and you will soon have some feathered friends.

Create a woodland edge by using a diversity of plants with characteristics such as fruits, berries, or color to attract birds. Dense shrubbery at the front moving to varied height plants offer quick cover from predators. Edge the plantings with large shade trees to provide a canopy and plant a few evergreen trees to provide winter shelter.

Water alone will attract birds. Fill a shallow pan, placed in an open area to prevent predator attacks, with no more than 3 inches of water. Many birds prefer moving water. Locate ponds and bird baths where they will receive morning sun and are sheltered from winds.

Food will also attract birds. A mixture of sunflower seeds, corn, and millet will appeal to a wide variety of seed eaters while suet or peanut butter mixtures will attract insect eaters. Scattering food on the ground works fine or a wide variety of feeders are available, including platforms, trays, tubes, hoppers, and mesh bags. When selecting a feeder, consider how easy it will be to fill and clean. If you have squirrels (and who doesn't), consider making your feeder squirrel-proof. Otherwise, the bird food will only result in fat squirrels in your yard.

Feeding birds does require a commitment beyond throwing food out the door occasionally. Birds become dependent on a food source, especially in the winter. So once you begin feeding them, it would be best to continue at least until warm weather and more natural food sources become available. It is also very important to keep the feeder and bath clean to avoid avian diseases. A thorough cleaning and disinfecting with a bleach solution is required at some regular interval, depending on the type of feeder. Follow the manufacturer's or bird shop's recommendations.

Limit pesticide and herbicide use to safeguard both the birds and the insects they feed on.

Bad Birds

Not all birds are a welcome sight at your feeder. Non-native birds, primarily house sparrows and European starlings are aggressive at feeders. Both of these birds have displaced native bird nesting sites and are blamed for the decline in native bird populations. Starlings can cause extensive crop damage to berries and fruit.

Blue herons think nothing of making a feast out of your expensive koi pond. Urban crows, gulls, and pigeons are dirty, messy, noisy and they intimidate small birds.

Plants for Birdscapes

Design your landscape to include some of the following to attract birds to your yard. Many of the plants listed here are native plants since they are best for backyard birds.

Trees	Shrubs
<i>Acer circinatum</i> (Vine Maple)	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i> (Saskatoon Serviceberry)
<i>Alnus rubra</i> (Red Alder)	<i>Berberis</i> (Barberry)
<i>Arbutus menziesii</i> (Madrone)	<i>Buxus</i> (Boxwood)
<i>Betula papyrifera</i> (Paper Birch)	<i>Callicarpa</i> (Beautyberry)
<i>Chamaecyparis lawsoniana</i> (Port Orford Cedar)	<i>Cornus stolonifera</i> (Red Osier Dogwood)
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i> (English Holly)	<i>Cotoneaster lacteus</i> , <i>C. horizontalis</i> (Cotoneaster)
<i>Juniperus occidentalis</i> (Western Juniper)	<i>Elaeagnus</i> (Silverberry)
<i>Larix</i> (Larch)	<i>Euonymus</i>
<i>Liquidambar</i> (Sweet Gum)	<i>Gaultheria shallon</i> (Salal)
<i>Malus</i> (Crabapple)	<i>Ligustrum</i> (Privet)
<i>Morus</i> (Mulberry)	<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i> (Oregon Grape)
<i>Myrica californica</i> (Pacific Wax Myrtle)	<i>Photinia</i>
<i>Picea</i> (Spruce)	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i> (English laurel)
<i>Pinus ponderosa</i> (Ponderosa Pine)	<i>Pyracantha coccinea</i> (Firethorn)
<i>Prunus</i> (Cherry, Plum)	<i>Ribes sanguineum</i> (Red-Flowering Currant)
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> (European Mountain Ash)	<i>Rosa nutkana</i> , <i>R. rugosa</i> (Nootka and Rugosa Rose)
<i>Taxus brevifolia</i> (Pacific Yew)	<i>Rubus parvifloris</i> (Salmonberry)
<i>Thuja plicata</i> (Western Red Cedar)	<i>Sambucus racemosa</i> (Red Elderberry)
<i>Tsuga</i> (Hemlock)	<i>Symphoricarpos</i> (Snowberry)
	<i>Vaccinium parvifolium</i> , <i>V. ovatum</i> (Red and Evergreen Huckleberry)

Here are some of the birds you can expect to see during the winter months in southern Washington and northern Oregon. For seed-loving birds, the seeds they like to eat are also listed, in their order of preference.

- Brewer's Blackbird
- Black-capped Chickadee (black oil sunflower, sunflower chips, peanut pieces, suet)

- Chestnut-backed Chickadee (black oil sunflower, sunflower chips, peanut pieces, suet)
- Bushtit (suet)
- Red-breasted Nuthatch (black oil sunflower, suet)
- Brown Creeper
- Purple Finch (black oil sunflower, niger thistle)
- House Finch (black oil sunflower, sunflower chips)
- Red Crossbill
- Pine Siskin (niger thistle, black oil sunflower, sunflower chips, millet)
- American Goldfinch (niger thistle, black oil sunflower, sunflower chips)
- Evening Grosbeak (black oil sunflower)
- Western Meadowlark
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- Northern Goshawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Belted Kingfisher
- Killdeer
- Anna's Hummingbird (nectar)
- Blue Jay
- Stellar's Jay (whole peanuts, peanut pieces, cracked corn, black oil sunflower)
- Scrub Jay (whole peanuts, peanut pieces, cracked corn, black oil sunflower)
- American/NW Crow
- Common Raven
- Great Blue Heron
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Barn Owl
- Mallard
- Wood Duck
- Canada Goose
- Ring-necked Pheasant (cracked corn, millet)
- Blue Grouse
- Ruffed Grouse

- Wild Turkey
- California Quail (cracked corn, millet)
- Mountain Quail
- Rufous-sided Towhee
- Chipping Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Fox Sparrow
- Golden-crowned Sparrow
- House Sparrow (millet, black oil sunflower, niger thistle, sunflower chips, peanut pieces)
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Red-Breasted Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker (suet)
- Hairy Woodpecker (suet)
- Northern Flicker (suet, black oil sunflower)
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Bewick's Wren
- Winter Wren
- Marsh Wren

References

Backyard Bird Shop.

National Audubon Society.

National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.