

Straight Talk on Straight Species

When seeking native plants, it is recommended that “straight species” are preferred. These plants are tied genetically to wild strains, often locally procured genotypes, and offer the best resources to birds. A straight species will have a Genus name and species name. Any additional names in the Latin articulation, especially those in quotations, indicate a variety that while based in the native, may have features expressed for horticultural purposes (such as color, habit or fruit size) rather than botanical (natural). For example, the straight species of Winterberry Holly will be expressed simply *Ilex verticillata* while a variety might be “*Ilex verticillata* Apollo” which is one variety cultivated specifically for its bronze leaves.



BUILDING BIRD HABITAT

One Plant at a Time



*Fifteen Great Native Plants
that Birds Love*



BIRD TOWN
PENNSYLVANIA

TREES

1. Oak

If you could only do one thing to improve ecology, it would be to plant a native oak. Not only are the acorns favored by many birds and other wildlife, but this is the #1 host tree for moths and butterflies meaning it will be the nursery for countless caterpillars. And birds need caterpillars for their babies. Native examples include white, black, swamp and pin.



2. Cherry

With an abundance of fruit just the right size for birds, cherry trees are an important food source for 41 species. It's also an important host plant for a myriad of Lepidoptera (moths, butterflies). Native examples include black, pin, and chokecherry.

3. Pine

Conifers provide important cover but also a favored food source for 43 species including nuthatch, warblers and woodpeckers. They also enhance a landscape with year-round color and depth. Native examples include eastern white, pitch, red.



4. Holly

The American Holly is another evergreen that offers cover and fruit at a critical time of the year. It's consistently used by several species as a nesting site due to the density of its leathery leaves.

5. Birch

Thirty-three species of birds favor birches mostly due to the ample seeds and buds. It also makes a great host plant and some species do very well in wet soil. Native examples include gray, river, yellow and sweet.



SHRUBS

6. Serviceberry

These can be considered small trees or large shrubs, and in any form these are some of the most ecologically valuable plants you can add. The fruits are eaten by at least 36 species of birds and the leaves serve as nurseries for growing caterpillars. Native examples are shadbush (Juneberry), smooth, and downy.

7. Dogwood

The dogwood shrubs provide great cover, fruit, and insects to birds. They are also tolerant of wet soil and even some shade! Native examples are grey, red-osier, silky, flowering, and alternate leaved.

8. Viburnum

Multi-stemmed viburnum provide nesting sites as well as fruit and insects. In addition, they make ideal native plants for the landscape often offering showy flowers and privacy cover. Native examples include cranberry, witherod, arrowwood, maple- leafed, blackhaw.

9. Elderberry

Well known for their desirable and abundant dark fruits, Common Elderberry also serves as a host plant for a variety of butterflies and moths.



10. Holly

Several small species of holly provide winter resources for birds. The female plant of Winterberry Holly (you'll need a male nearby too) have fruit that linger after the leaves have fallen from this deciduous holly. Inkberry Holly is a compact evergreen that provides good cover and dark fruit for birds.

HERBACEOUS

11. Composite Flowers

Contain flower heads that are comprised of clusters of small flowers. Not only important to insect pollinators, but the seeds produced in each flower head may be eaten by birds such as sparrows, goldfinches, and others. Great examples include asters, sunflowers, coreopsis, mints (Pycnanthemum) and coneflowers.

12. Tubular Flowers

Built for pollinators and hummingbirds, some of the native tube-shaped flowers are “must haves” in a hummingbird garden. Native examples include Cardinal Flower (Lobelia spp), Coral Honeysuckle, Trumpet Vine, Columbine, Bee Balm (Monarda spp).



13. Vines

Several provide fruit and all are host plants for caterpillars. Those vines that can produce density will also serve as nesting habitat for songbirds. Natives include Virginia Creeper, Poison Ivy, American Wisteria, and the previously mentioned Coral Honeysuckle and Trumpet Vine.

14. Tall Plants

Adding height to a landscape not only provides visual interest, but is attractive to pollinators and birds. Examples include Joe-pye Weed, New York Ironweed, Cup Plant, Dogbane, some native grasses.

15. Volunteers

If these show up in your yard and are in a spot you don't mind – leave them for the value they provide to birds and insects. Some of these can be considered “aggressive” but not invasive as an exotic would be. Examples include American Pokeweed, White Snakeroot, Fleabane, goldenrod.





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This list contains some of the best native plants for birds, and represents a small percentage of native plants available for your landscape. The use of exotic plants in the landscape has created a disconnect from nature by not providing resources to birds and insects; resources to which they are biologically connected.

In addition, the loss of a contiguous tree canopy has been a challenge to forest-nesting birds. The good news is that native plants are now easy to find and rewarding to grow! Explore native plant nurseries and sales and get to know the plants of Pennsylvania! Become familiar with sun exposure, soil moisture, and soil composition in your yard so you can match the plants with those conditions.