

Add a Little Song to Your Landscape

By Forrest Connelly

With the temperatures getting a little cool, but not quite cold yet, working out in the yard can be as pleasant this time of year as any. Without out much lawn mowing going on, one of the projects you may want to consider is attracting birds to your home landscape; naturally, and not with just bird feeders but using landscape plants designed in a way to provide food and shelter for our feathered friends. Birds help bring a landscape to life with their melodious songs, bright colors and lively movements. They also help keep plants healthy by eating many potentially damaging insects. Adding a birdfeeder to the landscape is a good way to draw birds into your garden, but if you want to attract a wide range of birds and have them call your backyard home, you need to create a suitable habitat.

Having a wide variety of plant species of different heights, flowering times, and growth forms will create the best habitat. Since different types of birds prefer to nest at different heights, planting layers of groundcovers, shrubs, small trees and large trees will allow many different kinds of birds to live in the same horizontal space. Diverse plantings also ensure a wide range of food is available throughout the year when different bird species are present. Our local birds known as resident species live here year round and include cardinals, bluebirds, and chickadees. Planting evergreen trees and shrubs is particularly important for resident birds which need places to shelter from weather and predators in winter. Fall is the best time to plant trees and shrubs in this area. Cooler air and soil temperatures encourage plants to put their energy into growing roots, while winter rains help plants become well established before the onset of summer heat and drought.

Seed and berry producing plants are essential food sources for many bird species, especially during fall migration. Native plants are particularly well suited to our climate and our native birds. A few commonly available native plants appropriate for home landscapes that produce seeds and berries that birds favor include beautyberry, eastern red cedar, dogwood, wax myrtle, river birch, southern magnolias, oaks and pines. Native perennials that produce seeds for birds include orange coneflower, purple coneflower, 'Fireworks' goldenrod, asters and panic grass. To benefit birds, do not cut these perennials back in fall. Instead wait to cut them back in early spring to allow birds to feed on their seeds over winter. Evergreen plants, such as wax myrtle, yaupon, and American holly, provide shelter from wind and rain and can be included in any wildlife habitat planting.