



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

How to Attract Birds to Your Yard – April 18, 2020

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For those of us obeying social distancing rules and staying at home, boredom can set in. Stuck at your computer all day while you work long distance? Open up the curtains and enjoy the view of your own backyard. Get your children (and yourself) involved in identifying different bird species by looking them up online. Or buy (online!) a birding book or magazine. Here's a few things you can do to get started.

First of all, it is important to become familiar with what kinds of birds live in our area. No matter what you do, you are not going to attract a cardinal to your home in Visalia. Cardinals are more common east of the Rocky Mountains. Bird lists are available from the Tulare County Audubon Society. Knowing which birds are common to our area will help you identify what those birds look for in their habitat, and then you can try to provide those things (buying online for delivery or for store pickup) to attract them.

A few of the birds common to Visalia are goldfinches, doves, warblers, kinglets, cedar waxwings, sparrows, mockingbirds, and blue jays. Species will differ as you get into more rural areas and into the foothills.

Just like most living things, birds need food, shelter, and water in order to survive and thrive.

Food

Birds eat a variety of food. Some eat seeds. Others eat insects, berries and fruit. Birds that eat seeds might stay through the winter eating from your backyard feeder if you provide the sort of seeds that they like. But birds that eat insects and fruit will migrate to where those foods are available.

To attract seed-eating birds to your backyard, you can provide food stations filled with seeds. Lists of which type of seed will attract which kind of bird can be found at the website I provide at the end of this article. You can also plant seed-producing flowers in your garden. The key is to avoid pruning the spent flowers after they bloom so the birds will have a supply of seeds available.

If you want to attract birds other than seed-eating birds, you must know and provide the food that they will eat. You can plan your landscape to attract birds. Learn the habitat preferences for the birds you want to attract, and plan accordingly. When planning your landscape, determine which plants grow well in our area. Native plants are usually best because they are adapted to our growing conditions.

There is an interesting fact that I learned about native plants and birds. Birds eat insects. Native plants attract more insects than exotic plants. So, planting native plants will result in having more birds. For example, a ginkgo tree from Asia, even though it grows well here, attracts as few as 3 species of insects. A paperbark tree in Australia hosts 409 species of insects. The same tree in the U.S. hosts 8 species. But a native oak tree may attract 557 species of insects.



Birds that eat insects often use a perch over a grassy area so they can fly to the ground where they hover to catch an insect and then return to a perch. Giving birds a fence post as a perch is easy to add to your landscape. Avoid spraying chemicals on your lawn to ensure that the birds have an abundance of insects as well. The birds will act as a natural pest control!

In addition to grass, nesting areas (perhaps nesting boxes) and perches, your landscape should include plants that provide fruits and berries. Planting small trees and shrubs that provide berries at different times of the year will encourage birds to linger longer.

Shelter

Trees and shrubs provide many things that will attract birds to your yard. Trees provide shade and shelter from the elements. They provide a spot to build a nest. And trees attract insects that the birds will feast on. Some trees produce seeds and fruit that the birds will eat as well.

Water

Birds need a source of fresh water. A pond, a fountain, a bird bath, or even just water trickling over a large rock will draw birds to a cool drink or a bath.

A word of caution. Cats are a problem for birds. Birds will avoid your yard if you have cats that hang out there. Cats are a predator and birds will try to avoid them.

After doing some research about what birds live in your area and some planning to provide food, shelter and water for them, you can get out your binoculars and bird books or magazines and become a backyard birder!

Resources:

Tulare County Audubon Society <https://tularecountyaudubon.wixsite.com/tularecountyaudubon/links>

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

<https://ebird.org/home>

Audubon Society - Native Plants list

www.audubon.org/native-plants

National Wildlife Federation backyard habitat program

<https://www.nwf.org/garden-for-wildlife/create>

Bird Watchers Magazine

<https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/learn/feeding/foodchart.php>



In accordance to the Shelter-at-Home guidelines, the Master Gardeners have cancelled all public events until at least May 10, but if you leave a message on our phone lines, we will get back to you!

For answers to your home gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 684-3325, or Kings County at (559) 852-2736, or visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions: http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

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