



Inside Region 3

Midwest Region

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A mourning dove rests in a backyard nest. Photo by Deanne Endrizzi/USFWS.

Attracting Birds to Your Yard

Did you know that you can turn your yard into a bird magnet with a little bit of effort? Birds need four elements to survive. They need food, water, shelter and space.

Space could be a limiting factor determined by the size of your yard or even the lack of a yard. No problem. If you can provide the first three elements, you are on your way to creating a bird oasis.

Food

Providing food for birds is an important element. You don't need to do anything elaborate. Providing a feeder with seeds will get you the most bang for your buck. A hopper feeder with black oil sunflower seeds works best for attracting the most species of birds. The cheap grocery store mixes contain many kinds of seeds that most birds don't like.

For luring even a wider variety of birds to your yard, you may want to add a suet cage and/or a hummingbird or oriole feeder. If you are a bit ambitious, you can make your own suet mixes or sugar water.

Water

Not all birds like seed, suet or sugar water. That's okay because water will attract your feeder birds as well as birds that don't come to feeders. Providing a basic bird bath will offer water that most birds need. To make your bird bath more appealing, you may want to add a fountain or a dripper. You can make your set-up as simple or as elaborate as you wish. A simple idea is to place a small hole in the bottom of a milk jug. Hang the jug over the bird bath to allow the water to drip into the bath. The sound of water will entice birds to the water.

Shelter

If you want to encourage birds to nest in your yard, you need to supply shelter. It is even important to provide a bit of shelter near feeders and bird baths, so the birds have a place to escape to if predators are nearby. Though, you don't want the shelter too near your water feature. Predators may hide in the nearby vegetation and sneak up on the birds to pounce.

A brush pile is an easy shelter to provide by merely stacking branches in a pile. Three types of plants can be used for shelter. If you pick the right plants, they may also serve as a food source.

Trees

Most birds that you may attract to your yard favor trees. Native trees are preferred since birds like to eat their seeds. Trees such as ash and maples are easy to purchase and establish.

Of course trees which produce fruit are not only attractive because of their fruit, but some birds eat the blossoms and insects these trees attract.

Shrubs

There are a good number of birds that build their nests in shrubs -- catbirds, cardinals and robins to name a few. Why not provide native berry shrubs like elderberry or dogwood? These shrubs can provide protection as well as a food source. You may also keep potted shrubs on a deck or patio.

Flowers

Flowers can provide shelter and food for birds, not to mention their appealing beauty. If you plant prairie flowers, you could leave the plant stocks standing throughout winter to provide birds cover from the elements and a hideout from predators. Many types of dried flower heads offer seeds throughout the winter creating a cold weather snack for birds. An added bonus is that flowers also attract pollinators like bees and butterflies. Some flower varieties can be grown in planters and pots.

It's best to not use chemicals in your garden if you intend on attracting wildlife. Search for safe alternative to prevent pest damage.

Finally, you can erect all sorts of nest boxes to invite cavity nesting species to nest in your yard. The most common species that use houses are house wren, black-capped chickadee and eastern bluebird. Check dimensions for holes for the boxes and the appropriate habitat for placement then you'll be on your way.

There are many things you can do to invite birds to your yard and as long as you have the above elements covered, you may attract some surprising visitors without much effort.

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Editor's note: This year is the centennial for an important tool in our conservation toolbox as the Migratory Bird Treaty turns 100. Regionally we are teaming up with partners who are literally across the western hemisphere for events and activities throughout the year. For more information, visit our national Centennial [website](#).