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## Bird-Friendly Plants

To encourage birds to visit your landscape, provide them with these three essential elements: quality food, **fresh water**, and safe cover from predators and the elements.

This article focuses on plants as a source of bird food. For more information on bird feeders, water, and shelter, please reference **Gardening for Birds**.



Bluejay. Credit: Jim E. Davis, UF/IFAS

## What Do Birds Eat?

When people talk about feeding birds they are generally thinking of songbirds and hummingbirds. A healthy Florida yard can help support these attractive species, plus woodpeckers, doves, cranes, and many more. But what will you feed them? Diets differ between species; some birds are frugivores (eating fruit) and some are insectivores (eating

insects). Some, like mockingbirds, actively switch back and forth.

The most fool-proof menu you can offer migratory and native birds are Florida's native plants and the insects that feed on them. These food sources provide the right nutrients at the right time, supporting birds through all seasons of the year and all parts of their lifecycle.

## Selecting Bird-Friendly Plant Species

Planting species that bear seeds and fruits will make your landscape one that provides for birds in abundance. Any native plant (in the right place) can provide shelter for birds and food for insects, too. This makes native plants bird-friendly plants but we've listed some of our favorite below.

Many birds feed on the berries of native plants like **Simpson's stopper**, **berry-producing hollies**, **American beautyberry**, **wild coffee**, **blueberry**, and **red mulberry**. Native fruit-bearing plants, like **Chickasaw plum**, **passion flower**, **pawpaw**, **wax myrtle**, **native persimmon**, and **seagrape** are also excellent food sources for birds. Florida's state tree, the **sabal palm**, is a favorite source of fruit for robins, mockingbirds, and many more.



Simpson's stopper. Credit: Jim E. Davis, UF/IFAS

**Native wildflowers** bear seeds throughout the year, and attract insects, too. Leave the deadheads on and the birds will thank you. And to keep hummingbirds happy, include

nectar-producing plants like [coral honeysuckle](#), [firebush](#), and [scarlet salvia](#) in your garden as well. Read more in our article on [Hummingbird Gardens](#).

As you plant, be on the lookout for these [bad berries](#): Brazilian pepper, nandina, coral ardisia, asparagus fern, and [Surinam cherry](#). All of these are invasive species. Birds may appreciate the berries, but since non-natives support fewer insect species, they actually decrease the amount of food available to birds throughout the year. Check the [UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-native Plants for Florida's Natural Areas](#) for more information.

## Bugs as Bird Food

A yard crawling with bugs is one brimming with bird food! Birds don't just eat seeds and fruits; some rely on worms or insects as their main source of protein. Other sources of bird food include lizards, skinks, small snakes, and amphibians. A healthy population of insects will draw these to your landscape, too.



Scarlet skimmer dragonfly. Credit: Jim E. Davis, UF/IFAS

Entomology research indicates that our native plant species support far more native insects than do non-native plants. This is good news; it means that supporting native bird populations (and attracting them to your yard) is as simple as installing native plant species. For more about backyard ecology, we suggest “Bringing Nature Home,” by Douglas Tallamy.

Last but not least, brush piles and snags provide shelter to insects. This makes them a source of bird food, and for brush and **cavity-nesters**, a source of shelter as well. Brush piles in particular are magnets for small bird species, like warblers and Carolina wrens.

Woodpeckers and other birds feed on the insects that live in snags. Birds of prey, like raptors and owls, often use snags as hunting and nesting perches. If you're planning to remove a tree from your property, instead of cutting it to the ground completely, consider leaving a ten- to fifteen-foot stump for wildlife to use.

For more question about gardening to support wildlife, please contact **your county Extension office**.

## Also on Gardening Solutions

- **Cavity Dwellers**
- **Creating Wildlife Habitats with Dead Wood**
- **DIY Suet**
- **Florida's Keystone Plants**
- **Hummingbird Gardens**
- **Migratory Birds**
- **Providing Water to Wildlife**
- **Wildflowers for All Seasons**



Redbellied woodpecker. Credit: Jim E. Davis, UF/IFAS

## Bird-Friendly Plants

- **Beautyberry**

- **Blueberry**
- **Chickasaw Plum**
- **Coral Honeysuckle**
- **Elderberry**
- **Firebush**
- **Golden Dewdrop**
- **Hollies**
- **Mulberry**
- **Passion Flower**
- **Pawpaw**
- **Sabal Palm**
- **Scarlet Salvia**
- **Seagrape**
- **Simpson’s Stopper**
- **Walter’s Viburnum and Other Viburnum Species**
- **Wax Myrtle**
- **Wild Coffee**

### **More from UF/IFAS**

- **UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-native Plants for Florida’s Natural Areas**

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## Contact

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