

LIFE

Sally Scalera: Want to attract birds to your yard? These trees will help

Sally Scalera For FLORIDA TODAY

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An important principle of Florida-Friendly Landscaping is attracting wildlife.

This is a popular hobby for many people. It's fun to go outside and enjoy the butterflies and birds. It's very easy to attract wildlife by planting the correct plants that provide food and shelter.

There is a long list of trees that can be planted to attract birds. Some of the trees are small like our native fringetree, *chionanthus virginicus*, which produces gorgeous white, fringed flowers in the spring before the foliage sprouts.

After the flowers fade, fruit is formed, and when they're ripe, it doesn't take birds long to eat them all.

Another small native tree is sweet acacia (*vachellia farnesiana*), which is also a nitrogen-fixer. It's great to have legumes growing in the yard to supply some nitrogen to plants growing near them.

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Sweet acacia produces small fragrant yellow pom-pom flowers throughout the year and delicate foliage that provides dappled shade for plants growing beneath. The flowers produce a wonderful fragrance, which is another plus.

A large-growing tree for attracting birds would be our native hackberry (*celtis laevigata*), which is also called sugarberry. Be sure to plant it away from the home,

patio, deck and driveway, because they can cause a mess.

The Asian woolly hackberry aphid creates honeydew, a clear sticky substance, that falls from the tree and coats whatever is below, including cars and patio furniture.

Southern red cedar (*Juniperus silisicola*) is a native evergreen tree that provides great nesting cover, and female trees produce berries for the birds.

It's important to make sure that southern red cedar trees grow with a single trunk, or central leader, because the wood is weak. Multiple leaders will result in the trunks being torn apart during windy or stormy weather.

If you would like to attract birds to your yard or you're thinking of adding a new tree, here are more trees to consider:

Blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), cherry laurel (*Prunus caroliniana*), Chickasaw plum (*Prunus angustifolia*), Hollies (*Ilex* spp.), Elms (*Ulmus* spp.), green cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*), gumbo limbo (*Bursera simaruba*), Hercule's club (*Zanthoxylum clava-hercules*), loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*), oaks (*Quercus* spp.), marlberry (*Ardisia escallonioides*), May hawthorn (*Crataegus aestivalis*), persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), pigeon plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*), hickories (*C. glabra*, *C. floridana*), pond apple (*Annona glabra*), pygmy fringetree (*Chionanthus pygmaeus*), redbay (*Persea borbonia*), red mulberry (*Morus rubra*), watinleaf (*Chrysophyllum oliviforme*), seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), wimpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*), wouthern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*), summer haw (*Crataegus flava*), swamp bay (*Persea palustris*), swamp dogwood (*Cornus foemina*), sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), white stopper (*Eugenia axillaries*), wild lime (*Zanthoxylum fagara*), wild olive (*Osmanthus americanus*), winged elm (*Ulmus alata*) and yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*).

These trees are native species, except for the loquat which produces edible fruit, as do our native red mulberry and sea grape. To find out more about their height and spread, do an internet search using their scientific name, followed by ifas, which

stands for the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. When it is added to the search, you will find information from the University of Florida and possibly from some of the UF/IFAS extension offices throughout the state.

Birdfeeders can also be used to attract birds.

You may have better success by using just one type of bird seed in the feeder, such as safflower seeds, which can result in less waste. Birds can be picky eaters and fling out the seeds they don't want.

Also, be sure to hang the feeder close to a window, so that you can see the birds easily, and away from shrubs, so cats can't ambush them. To attract as many birds as possible, add a fountain, because the sound of moving water attracts birds.

To attract hummingbirds, the key is to choose plants that produce red, nectar-rich flowers. The closer they are planted to your house, the more likely you will be to see the hummingbirds when they visit.

Many people believe that we don't have hummingbirds here, but we do, it's just hard to catch a glimpse of them. They are so small and fast that they will fly away before we ever even knew they were there.

Trees that attract hummingbirds are red bottlebrush (*callistemon citrinus*), weeping bottlebrush (*callistemon viminalis*) and the coral bean (*erythrina herbacea*), which is also a nitrogen-fixing plant like the sweet acacia.

Right now, my coral bean tree is full of seed pods, which is proof my tree was visited by hummingbirds multiple times this spring. If you have the space for a medium sized tree (at least a 20-by-20 foot rooting area), the geiger tree (*cordia sebestena*) produces gorgeous bright orange tubular flowers that attract hummingbirds.

Planting one of these trees is a great way to attract birds and add shade to your yard. Be sure to give your tree the best possible future by adding mycorrhizal

inoculum (i.e. MycoApply All Purpose Granular, Xtreme Gardening Mykos, Plant Success Granular Mycorrhizae, etc.) to the planting hole.

For the coral bean and sweet acacia, also add some rhizobium inoculum (i.e. Verdesian N-Dure or Guard-N, etc.), when planting, to help the tree fix atmospheric nitrogen.

Now, go outside and walk around your yard. If it's sunny and hot, why not plant a new tree or two to attract birds and grow a little shade for future summers.

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