

Backyard for the birds

Every spring hungry, courting birds visit my back yard. Some love my small city lot and stay until it's time for their fall migration. Cardinals have even taken up year-round residency.



(photo by F. Huneault)

Red-Breasted Grosbeak in the shelter of cedars

Birds will be attracted to your yard if you provide water for them to drink and bathe in. And, you can make your landscape "bird-friendly" by planting conifers, seed and fruit bearing deciduous trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants.

Conifers provide nesting sites and give the birds a place to just "hang out". An evergreen hedge is a popular roost site that offers good cover as birds explore your yard. A mix of food-bearing conifers and deciduous tree species will combine to form a background landscape once they mature. Shrubs can also provide resting spots and a delicious

meal of berries.

Around my home I have planted conifers including pine trees, a cedar hedge, and deciduous shrubs that offer small fruits in the fall - winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), silver buffaloberry (*Shepherdia argentea*), and American highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*). Last year, a hermit thrush visited for several weeks in the spring and was there in the fall, cleaning up all the berries on the fruiting winterberry bush.

For nest building, your feathered guests often use the withered leaves of herbaceous plants like daylilies. In the fall, leave some foliage on these plants and the following spring, postpone cleaning-up so the birds have lots of building materials. Ornamental grasses also serve this purpose well. I have watched robins clean up blue fescues much more efficiently than I ever could. Grasses also provide seeds for fall migrants and over-wintering birds.



(photo by F. Huneault)

Robin gathering blue fescue grass for nesting material

Native perennials like black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) and purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) have edible seeds and are drought resistant, a worthy characteristic in many gardens. Not all perennial flowers produce abundant seeds, but some that

grow thick stems or reach shrub size are good nesting sites for song sparrows and white-crowned sparrows. Examples are lupin (*Lupinus x hybrida*) and threadleaf tickseed (*Coreopsis verticillata*) especially when planted in groups.

Annual flowers are prolific seed producers. Easy-to-grow small-bird favourites are cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*) and zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*). A single zinnia seed head can keep a goldfinch quite busy cracking open one seed for every petal. Some annuals attract bigger birds: Sunflowers attract blue jays and grain amaranth (*Amaranthus hypochondriacus*) attracts cardinals.

Hummingbirds will visit plants with bell-shaped flowers such as foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) and trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*) to collect their nectar. These birds are also attracted to red flowers like scarlet runner beans and cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*).

One way to attract foraging birds is to add leaf mould and other mulches around your plants. Sparrows, thrushes, and catbirds are leaf-gleaners that feed on insects and small seeds; they love leaf litter. Last summer a pair of catbirds - easily identified by their cat-like meow call - nested and spent the summer within view.

With just a little planning, you too can create a bird-friendly landscape and enjoy birding right in your own back yard.

Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 1, Number 5
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- trowel_talk_editor@rogers.com

May TO DO List

- Plant out annuals and vegetables if there is no risk of frost
- Summer tubers and bulbs can be planted also once the risk of frost has passed
- Work in some compost or manure when planting
- Add a layer of organic mulch (such as shredded pine or cedar, shredded leaves, compost or pine needles) to reduce evaporation and to cut back on watering.
- Keep an eye out for pests and diseases – you can always call or e-mail Master Gardeners to help with identification and solutions (our contact info is to the right)

Tip of the Month:

Cottage season has started early this year and we should carefully consider our gardening practices near rivers and lakes.



Ontario's pesticide ban has removed a large number of toxic products from the market, thus eliminating their run-off into the waterways.

However, there is still more we gardeners can do. Our choice of plants is also very important. We should avoid using invasive species that will "escape" into neighboring woodlands, wetlands and grasslands. A better choice would be native plants that are pest and disease resistant and often drought tolerant.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

Byward Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 a.m. – 5 p.m.)

Parkdale Market: Saturdays, June (9 a.m. – 1 p.m.)

Carp Market: Saturdays, May through June (8 a.m. – 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS:

Creating a Monarch Waystation – May 15, 2010 – 2:00

Speaker: Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener

Greenboro District Library, 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive, Ottawa

Hosted by Greenboro District Library (Free – register at 613-580-2957)

Demonstrations at the Lansdowne Farmers Market – May 16, 2010

10:30 – Container Gardens for Herbs – Diane McClymont-Peace

1:00 – Environmentally Friendly Control of Insect Pests – Edythe Falconer

Community Table, Lansdowne Farmers Market, Lansdowne Park

Roses – June 1, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Old March Town Hall, 821 March Road at Klondike

Hosted by Kanata-March Horticultural Society (Guests welcome)

Ponds & Water Features – June 17, 2010 – 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Vankleek Hill Community Centre, Vankleek Hill

Hosted by Vankleek Hill Horticultural Society (Guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

Shoreline plantings of native species will reduce erosion, provide food and habitat for birds, and help keep the waterways clean.



After all, isn't going to the cottage about relaxing. Native plants will

mean less watering and maintenance.

The following links provide good information about growing native plants and conservation.

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority:
www.rvca.ca

Living by Water Project:
www.livingbywater.ca

Native Plants:
www.ontariowildflowers.com
www.ontariotrees.com
www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php