

Gardening for Wildlife

Creating a Bird-Friendly Yard

To create a bird-friendly yard, plant your garden with a bird's diet in mind. Plant what birds like and what you like too, this creates biodiversity and a dynamic outdoor space to attract the widest variety of birds. Some people use the 70-30 rule (70% native plants; 30% other plants). Habitat loss due to development causes food and shelter for birds to disappear contributing to declines in migratory and resident songbirds. As natural spaces go away, your backyard can become an important wildlife refuge. Even small gardens, when planted thoughtfully, can provide the essentials birds need to survive: Food, Water, Shelter, and Safe Habitat.



Blooming Palo Verde tree with Rufous Hummingbird. ©Tony Woo

BIRD HABITAT ESSENTIALS

Food—For a broader range of species, plant native trees, shrubs, and flowers to attract insects that birds eat. And offer high-quality seed in different feeders for seed-eaters.

Water—Providing a consistent water source such as a birdbath, fountain, or small pond—supports essential behaviors like feather maintenance (preening) and hydration. Incorporating moving water, like a bubbler or dripper attracts even more birds.

Shelter—Birds need cover to stay safe from predators and weather. Trees, shrubs, dense grass, leaf piles, vines, and rock piles can serve as shelter.

Nesting Areas—Cavity-nesters like *chickadees* and *bluebirds* benefit from nesting boxes. Other birds like *towhees* may nest in shrubs. Some birds like *juncos* nest on the ground so ground cover is important.

GARDENING TIPS

Plant native plants: These support native insects—an essential food source for birds, especially when raising young. Oak trees, even after they die, are very beneficial.

Plant in layers: Combine tall trees, mid-sized shrubs, and low-growing plants to create natural structure.

Leave the leaf litter: Birds like sparrows and thrashers forage in it.

Avoid pesticides: Many birds rely on insects for food. By reducing chemicals, you protect them—and your family and pets.

Create “instant cover” in new yards: Use your discarded Christmas tree as a brush pile or add container gardens with nectar-rich flowers.

- Once in bloom, keep the flowers and don't hedge trim away.
- Minimize hard pruning or tree trimming during the breeding season between March–August. Dead trees are part of a natural

habitat. They support native insects and are often host to cavity nesting birds. If you are able to keep any portion of a dead or dying tree on your property it will help your bird life thrive.

THE PLANTS BIRDS LOVE

Native Trees & Shrubs for Wildlife

- Native Oaks
- Madrone
- Manzanita
- Toyon
- Ceanothus
- Elderberry
- Willow

Hummingbird & Butterfly Favorites

- California Fuchsia
- Penstemon
- Sticky Monkey Flower
- Western Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)
- Lantana
- Sages
- Red Larkspur (*Delphinium cardinale*)
- Twinberry (Native honeysuckle)
- Woolly Blue Curls (*Trichostema lanatum*)
- Island Bush Snapdragon (*Galvezia speciosa*)
- Wild Gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*)
- Quail Bush (*Atriplex lentiformis*)
- Bladder Pod (*Isomeris arborea*)
- Hound's Tongue (*Cynoglossum grande*)



Store owner Lisa Myers has a bird loving Oak Tree in her front yard and replaced her own front lawn with California Natives complete with bird nesting boxes, a bat box, and two bird baths to help the local wildlife.

PLANTS TO AVOID

Invasive plants harm native ecosystems. Many garden favorites, like pampas grass and English ivy, escape cultivation and displace native plants. Learn more about specific natives at: cal-ipc.org/plants/impact

NATIVE PLANT RESOURCES

- CNPS Santa Clara Valley Chapter – cnps-scv.org
- UC Master Gardeners Santa Clara – mastergardeners.org
- Our City Forest – ourcityforest.org
- OAEC – Occidental Arts & Ecology Center – oaec.org

CALIFORNIA NATIVE LANDSCAPING PROFESSIONALS

- Bay Maples: Wild CA Gardens – baymaples.com
- California Nativescapes – calnativescapes.com
- Smart Yards Coop – smartyardscoop.com/ourapproach

NATIVE PLANT NURSERIES

Your local nurseries often have a native plant section:

- Yerba Buena Nursery (Half Moon Bay) – yerbabuenanursery.com
- Yamagami's Garden Center (Cupertino) – yamagamis.com
- Curious Flora Nursery (formerly Annie's in Richmond) – curiousflora.com
- Grass Roots Ecology – grassrootsecology.org/nursery

BOOKS

- *Nature's Best Hope* – Douglas Tallamy
- *Designing California Native Gardens* – Keator & Middlebrook
- *The Landscaping Ideas of Jays* – Judith Lerner Lowry
- *The Habitat Garden Book* – Nancy Bauer
- *California Bees & Blooms* – Gordon Frankie
- *The California Native Landscape* – Greg Rubin & Lucy Warren
- *Reimagining the California Lawn* – Bornstein, Fross & O'Brien



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