

Birds and Native Plants, Part I

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Native plants play a crucial role in supporting bird populations by providing essential food, nutrients, and shelter that are vital to their survival, reproduction, and migration, while also showcasing the beauty of nature. This includes species such as native oaks, maples, dogwoods, hollies, serviceberries, sumacs, black-eyed Susans, goldenrods, and coneflowers.

Baby songbirds require large quantities of caterpillars, which are abundant on native oaks and maple trees, but rarely on non-native varieties. Oak and maple trees can support over 500 species of caterpillars that are vital for the survival of young songbirds.

Flowering dogwoods, elderberries, and persimmons produce fruits that nesting birds rely on. American holly, winterberry, and serviceberries also offer important berries for birds. Female Sumac plants produce fuzzy, red fruit clusters that are high in fat and highly appealing to birds!

Black-eyed Susans, Goldenrod, Joy-Pye Weed, Asters, and coneflowers provide seeds that many bird species enjoy. Additionally, ornamental native grasses, such as switchgrass and Little Bluestem, not only produce tasty seeds but also offer winter shelter. Native coral honeysuckles attract insects and provide nutritious berries and nectar for birds.

By planting a diverse range of native trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses, you actively contribute to the survival of local bird species. This approach ensures birds have a continuous supply of essential berries, fruits, seeds, nectar, insects, and eco-friendly shelter options throughout the year.



Yellow Warbler on Goldenrod, Adobe Licensed Photo

Please research the specific needs of the native plants that you want to grow to determine the species, toxicity, growing conditions, control of spread, care, maintenance, and upkeep that match your gardening style.

References:

VA Dept of Wildlife: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/Habitat-at-Home.pdf>
Virginia Native Plant Guides at <https://vnps.org/virginia-native-plant-guides/>
Plant VA Natives at <https://www.plantvirginianatives.org/>