

## HOW YOU CAN ATTRACT SONGBIRDS TO YOUR YARD WITH NATIVE PLANTS!



*Cedar waxwing; photo credit Pixabay*

If you'd like to attract and support songbirds in your yard, the best way is with native plants. It makes sense, if you think about it, because these birds need natural food sources throughout their life cycles, as well as places for shelter and nesting. As spring approaches and you make plans for your yard, here is some information about native plantings that will help attract and support songbirds.

What are native plants? They're plant species present in our area since before colonial settlers brought plants from Europe. Our native plants have co-existed with our native songbirds for thousands of years, and they support food chains that these songbirds depend on. Makes sense! There is a lot to find out about this fascinating topic. One source of information is Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PADCNR) ([website below](#)).

The key then, to supporting songbirds in your yard is to learn about native plants, and to add those plants to your yard instead of non-native plants. For example, winterberry holly is a great native shrub that has berries loved by robins. Some other fruit and berry-producing native choices are arrowwood viburnum, blueberries, dogwoods and crabapples. These are excellent additions, instead of non-native plants such as burning bush (invasive) or those with possibly toxic berries. If planting trees, native oaks and birches are choices that support the insect food chains that baby songbirds depend upon to survive, but non-native oriental cherry or crape myrtle are not. [Bringing Nature Home](#), an excellent book by Professor Doug Tallamy, details the comparative benefit that different shrubs, trees, grass and flower plantings can bring to songbirds. Sources in the links below also provide this type of information.

Native plantings can be as beautiful or even more beautiful to our eyes than showy commercial non-native plants. It all depends on how you design and tend to your yard. Also consider how a songbird views your yard: is it full of non-native plants that don't support food sources for birds (essentially a bird 'food desert'), or does it provide a welcome and essential haven? Your choices can make a real difference. You can attract and support songbirds with native plants!

**Resources for you:**

- [www.birdtownpa.org](http://www.birdtownpa.org) has great native plant and habitat information resources, as well as several newsletters you can sign up for. Additionally, it has links to other helpful information resources, including Penn State;
- [www.audubon.org/native-plants](http://www.audubon.org/native-plants) (user-friendly source by zip code)
- PADCNr's website, [www.dcnr.pa.gov](http://www.dcnr.pa.gov), is a great source of information, as follows: in the general search bar on the site, type in 'native plants'. Then select the search result 'Landscaping with Native Plants'. This opens up an information sheet where you can pull up a PDF brochure on 'Landscaping with Natives', and can choose links on 'Where to Buy Native Plants' and even prepared garden designs at 'Native Garden Templates', among other choices.

One native plant supplier right in our area, Redbud Nursery in Media, is on the statewide list;

- [www.homegrownnationalpark.org](http://www.homegrownnationalpark.org) provides more details on native plants and the particular birds and other wildlife those plants support, and it shows the importance of each of our yards.
- [www.nativeplantfinder.nwf.org](http://www.nativeplantfinder.nwf.org), by the National Wildlife Federation, shows 'keystone plants' for our region, and identifies the number of caterpillar species (essential for baby bird survival) for each plant.

Also, the Penn State Master Gardeners will be selling native garden plants, and providing advice, on May 11, from 9 – 2, at the Smedley Park Spring Plant Sale.