

Outstanding Native Plants for Birds in Central Virginia

In the last 50 years, songbird populations have declined by 30% due to a variety of causes. One major cause of this decline is a lack of food. Gardeners can help reverse this decline by planting native plants that provide food and shelter for birds. Native plants, especially keystone plants, provide more nutritious food than non-native plants. Keystone plants are critical to the food web and are essential for many wildlife species to complete their life cycle. According to Doug Tallamy, noted entomologist, a pair of chickadees need 6,000-9,000 caterpillars to successfully raise one clutch. Keystone plants support 90% of these vital caterpillars.



Bird species search for food in different areas; warblers look for bugs in the canopy layers, woodpeckers search for insects around tree trunks and sparrows forage for food on the ground. To increase bird diversity, plant in layers using canopy trees, understory trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants and groundcovers. Strive to include a variety of plants to provide food in the following categories: bugs, fruit, nuts/seeds and nectar. Below is an example of plant groupings that provide food for nesting, migrating and wintering birds in each season. Using 1-2 plants in each category will attract a variety of birds to your yard year around.

Plants that provide food year around for migrating, nesting and wintering birds.				
	spring	summer	fall	winter
Canopy	oaks native willows black cherry	oaks red maple river birch	oaks native cherries american beech	american holly eastern red cedar native pines
Understory	redbud serviceberry	native dogwood chokecherry	native dogwoods serviceberry	native dogwoods boxelder
Shrubs	spicebush blueberry	blueberry carolina rose native viburnums	spicebush sumacs bayberry	inkberry winterberry native viburnums
Vines	coral honeysuckle	coral honeysuckle	virginia creeper coral honeysuckle	virginia creeper
Wildflowers	virginia bluebells woodland phlox violets sedges	mountain mints beebalms native sunflowers cardinal flower	goldenrods asters native sunflowers coneflowers	coneflowers liatris joe-pye weed sedges

On the next page is a chart which gives a more extensive list of outstanding plants for birds in central Virginia. Keystone plants, which are extremely important plants in a balanced ecosystem, are highlighted.

Terrific Native Plants for Birds in Central Virginia

Trees	Flowers
native oaks: white, willow, scarlet **	asters: new england, aromatic, white wood, heart-leaved , calico, smooth
native birches: river, sweet	goldenrods: gray, showy, stiff, zigzag, sweet, wreath
native maples: red, boxelder	sunflower: woodland, narrow leaved, thinned leaved
native cherries: black, american plum, chokecherry	rudbeckia: orange coneflower, black-eyed susan, cutleaf coneflower
native willows: black, pussy, prairie	beebalm: scarlet, wild, spotted
native dogwoods: flowering, pagoda, silky	virginia bluebells
native pines: virginia, shortleaf, loblolly,	carolina rose
hickories: pignut, shagbark, mockernut **	silphiums: cup plant, rosinweed
eastern redbud	mountain mint: hoary, short-toothed, virginia
serviceberry	echinacea: purple coneflower
american holly	phlox: woodland, moss, meadow
sassafras	new york ironweed, upland ironweed
eastern red cedar	lobelias: cardinal flower, blue lobelia
black gum	coreopsis: whorled, tall
Shrubs	joe-pye-weed
	beardtongue
blueberry: highbush, lowbush	mistflower
chokeberry: red, black	liatris
viburnums: arrowwood, blackhaw, possum, mapleleaf	thoroughworts: hyssopleaf thoroughwort, boneset
	maryland golden aster
spicebush	white snakeroot
sumacs: fragrant, winged, smooth	wild columbine
deciduous hollies: inkberry, winterberry	giant purple hyssop
ninebark	Groundcovers
azaleas: pinxter, flame	
carolina rose	
sweetspire	
native hydrangea: oakleaf, wild, maple-leaf	
Vines	pussy toes
	partridgeberry
virginia creeper	allegheny spurge
coral honeysuckle	lyre-leaved sage

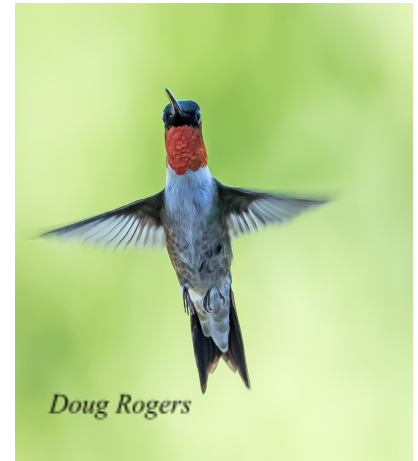
virgin's bower

sedges: seersucker, pennsylvania, meadow, rosy

Attracting Hummingbirds to Your Garden

In early April, the beautiful Ruby-throated Hummingbird arrives in Virginia after journeying from Central America. The hummingbird, weighing less than a penny, travels 500 miles across the Gulf of Mexico in approximately 20 hours. During migration, the hummingbird's heart beats up to 1,260 times per minute and its wings flap 15-18 times per second.

Why do the hummingbirds and other migrating birds undertake this perilous journey? They come here to raise their young. Migrating birds travel to North America for the abundant, rich diversity of insects. The major food source for young birds are insects, not seeds. Insects, especially young caterpillars, are rich in energy and protein.



An inviting habitat for hummingbirds provides several key features: shelter, nesting sites, nesting material, food and water. Trees and shrubs provide shelter and nesting sites. To build their nests, hummingbirds collect fibers from ferns, lichens and mosses. Several yards of spider web silk are used to glue all the fibers together to form their tiny nest. According to Doug Tallamy, a noted entomologist, 80% of the hummingbird's diet comes from spiders and tiny insects such as aphids, mosquitoes, gnats and caterpillars. Only 20 % of their diet comes from nectar.

In the flower garden, hummingbirds search for tiny insects on flowers and glean insects from the air. They also sip nectar with a high sugar concentration from tubular flowers. Leave leaf litter in the garden. Leaf litter is the primary egg laying habitat for many small insects such as gnats. Spiders, caterpillars and larvae over-winter in the leaf litter.

Keep gardens free of pesticides because 96 % of terrestrial birds in North America depend upon insects for survival. A garden filled with native plants supports hummingbirds, songbirds and insects including those important insect pollinators.

Outstanding Hummingbird Plants for Central Virginia

Trees	redbud, tulip poplar, red maple, oaks, native cherries, native willows
Shrubs	blueberry, virginia sweetspire, pinxter azalea, buttonbush, new jersey tea
Vines	coral honeysuckle, trumpet vine, virgin's bower
Early Season Flowers	lyreleaf sage, virginia bluebells, woodland phlox, beardstongue
Mid-Season Flowers	wild columbine, bee balm, butterfly weed, meadow phlox, liatris
Late Season Flowers	cardinal flowers, native sunflowers, ironweed, goldenrods, native asters
Ground cover	leaf litter, moss, ferns, carex, cutleaf toothwort, hepatica