

# Wisconsin's Best Native Plants for Attracting Birds

Unless otherwise noted, these species are native to most or all of Wisconsin. Native ranges are based on maps given on the University of Wisconsin Herbarium website ([www.botany.wisc.edu/wisflora/](http://www.botany.wisc.edu/wisflora/)).

## BEST NATIVE TREES FOR BIRDS

To maximize diversity, try to have trees from each group below.

### Fruit Trees

#### Summer Fruit

- Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) – At least 47 species eat the fruit, including Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Northern Mockingbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and White-throated Sparrow.
- Pin Cherry, Wild Red Cherry (*Prunus pennsylvanica*) – Fruit attracts Eastern Bluebird, among others.
- Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*), southern Wisconsin – 44 species eat its fruits, including cuckoos and tanagers.

#### Fall Fruit

- American Mountain Ash (*Sorbus americana*) – Fruit eaten by at least 14 species, including Cedar Waxwing, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird, Gray Catbird, and grosbeaks.
- Showy Mountain Ash (*Sorbus decora*) – A handsome tree; fruit enjoyed by birds.

#### Winter Fruit

- Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), primarily southern Wisconsin – 24 species eat the fruit; particularly liked by Northern Flicker, Northern Mockingbird, Swainson's Thrush, and Northern Cardinal.
- Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), primarily southern Wisconsin – 54 species have been noted eating the fruit, including Cedar Waxwing, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, and

Gray Catbird.

- Hawthorns: Cockspur Hawthorn (*Crataegus crus-galli*), southeastern Wisconsin; Downy Hawthorn (*C. mollis*) and Dotted Hawthorn (*C. punctata*) – Hawthorns can attract more than 20 species and are especially favored by Cedar Waxwing, Fox Sparrow, and Ruffed Grouse. In addition, they offer great cover and protection for nesting.

### Seed Trees

- Maples: Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Red Maple (*A. rubrum*), Box Elder (*A. negundo*), and Silver Maple (*A. saccharinum*).
- American Larch or Tamarack (*Larix laricina*).
- Birches: Paper Birch (*Betula papyrifera*), Yellow Birch (*B. alleghaniensis*), River Birch (*B. nigra*) (thelast is native only to the Wisconsin and Mississippi River valleys) – Seeds are a favorite of Pine Siskin, and Fox and American Tree Sparrows.

### Shelter Trees

- Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), primarily southern Wisconsin; Eastern Arborvitae or Northern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), primarily northern and eastern Wisconsin.

- White Spruce (*Picea glauca*), primarily northern Wisconsin.
- Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), primarily northern and central Wisconsin.

### Cavity Trees

- Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*).
- Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*).
- Oaks: White Oak (*Quercus alba*), Bur Oak (*Q. macrocarpa*), and Northern Red Oak (*Q. rubra*).
- Willows: Two natives for our area are Peach-leaved Willow (*Salix amygdaloides*) and Black Willow (*S. nigra*).

### Nut Trees

- White Oak (*Quercus alba*) – Acorns eaten by Northern Flicker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Blue Jay, and others.
- Bur Oak (*Q. macrocarpa*) – Acorns are a favorite food of Wood Duck.
- Northern Red Oak (*Q. rubra*) – Acorns eaten by many birds.

### Trees That Host Insects for Birds

- Oaks (*Quercus spp.*) – Host 532 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Willows (*Salix spp.*) – Host 455 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Poplars (*Populus spp.*), especially Quaking Aspen (*P. tremuloides*)

and Cottonwood (*P. deltoides*) – Host 367 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.

- Hickories (*Carya spp.*) – Host 235 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Box Elder (*Acer negundo*) and Maples (*Acer spp.*) – The genus hosts 297 species of butterflies and moths; Box Elder is a favorite among Wisconsin migrant birds.



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## BEST NATIVE SHRUBS FOR BIRDS

### Early-Summer Berries

- Serviceberries: A number of native species include Juneberry (*Amelanchier laevis*), Dwarf Serviceberry (*A. spicata*, *A. stolonifera*), and Downy Serviceberry (*A. arborea*) – The last is known to attract at least 19 species that eat its fruit.
- Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) – The tart fruit attracts at least 43 species, including bluebirds.

### Midsummer Berries

- Blackberries/Raspberries (*Rubus spp.*): Red Raspberry (*R. idaeus*, *R. strigosus*), Blackcap Raspberry (*R. occidentalis*), and Highbush Blackberry (*R. allegheniensis*) – At least 63 species eat their fruit.
- American Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) – At least 33 species eat its fruit, including Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, and Northern Cardinal.
- Currants/Gooseberries (*Ribes spp.*): Choose native species like Wild Black Currant (*R. americanum*), Missouri Gooseberry (*R. missouriense*), and Prickly Gooseberry (*R. cynosbati*) – The berries are eaten by at least 16 species of birds.
- Canadian Buffalo Berry (*Shepherdia canadensis*), native along Lakes Michigan and Superior.
- Blueberries (*Vaccinium spp.*): Low-bush Blueberry (*V. angustifolium*), Canada Blueberry (*V. myrtilloides*).

### Fall Berries

- Dogwoods (*Cornus spp.*): Pagoda Dogwood (*C. alternifolia*) – Fruits eaten by at least 34 species, including Downy Woodpecker, Brown Thrasher, Wood Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, and Cedar Waxwing.
  - Red-Osier Dogwood (*C. stolonifera*) – Fruits eaten by at least 18 species, including Gray Catbird and Wild Turkey.
  - Silky Dogwood (*C. amomum*) – At least 18 species feed on fruits.

- Gray Dogwood (*C. racemosa*) – Its fruit is consumed by at least 17 species, including Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, and Eastern Bluebird.
- Viburnums (*Viburnum spp.*):
  - Nannyberry (*V. lentago*) – Among birds feeding on its fruit are Gray Catbird, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, and Cedar Waxwing.
  - Downy Arrowwood (*V. rafinesquianum*).

### Winter Berries

- Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) – Fruits eaten by songbirds, winter waterfowl, and upland game birds.
- Sumacs (*Rhus spp.*):
  - Smooth Sumac (*R. glabra*) – At least 31 species eat the fruits, especially Gray Catbird, Wood Thrush, and Eastern Bluebird
  - Staghorn Sumac (*R. hirta*, *R. typhina*) – 21 species eat the fruit, including Red-eyed Vireo and American Robin.
- Roses (*Rosa spp.*) – Get native species that don't need pesticides and fertilizers:
  - Swamp Rose (*R. palustris*) – Its rose hips are eaten by at least 20 species and are preferred by Swainson's Thrush and Cedar Waxwing.
  - Pasture Rose (*R. carolina*).
  - Meadow Rose (*R. blanda*).
  - Prairie Wild Rose (*R. arkansana*) – At least 38 species feed on its hips, including Northern Cardinal and Brown Thrasher.

### Shrubs for Nests

- Speckled Alder (*Alnus incana subsp. rugosa*), Green Alder (*A. viridis*) (the latter is primarily in northern Wisconsin).



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- American Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*).
- Roses (*Rosa spp.*): Swamp Rose (*R. palustris*), Pasture Rose (*R. carolina*), Meadow Rose (*R. blanda*).
- Willows (*Salix spp.*): Pussy Willow (*S. discolor*), Prairie Willow (*S. humilis*), Beaked Willow (*S. bebbiana*).
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*).

### Shrubs for Shelter

- Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), southern half of Wisconsin – Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, and Purple Finch eat the berries.

### Shrubs for Seeds

- Speckled Alder (*Alnus incana subsp. rugosa*), Green Alder (*A. viridis*) (The latter is primarily in northern Wisconsin).

### Shrubs That Host Insects for Birds

- Pussy Willow (*Salix discolor*) – Willows (*Salix spp.*) host 455 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*) – Dogwoods (*Cornus spp.*) host 118 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.



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## BEST NATIVE VINES FOR BIRDS

### Vines for Berries

All provide fall and winter fruit.

- American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) – At least 15 species of birds eat the berries.
- Grapes (*Vitis spp.*): Riverbank Grape (*V. riparia*, *V. vulpina*) – 52 species eat

these grapes; the preferred food of 24. Pigeon Grape (*V. aestivalis*), primarily southern half of Wisconsin.

- Poison Ivy (*Rhus radicans*) – At least 55 species of birds eat the fruits.
- Greenbriar (*Smilax hispida*); also Carrion-flowers (*S. ecirrhata* and *S. herbacea*).
- Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and Grape Woodbine (*P. vitacea*) – Favorite berries of at least 35 species, including thrushes, woodpeckers, vireos, and warblers.

### Vines for Shelter and Nesting

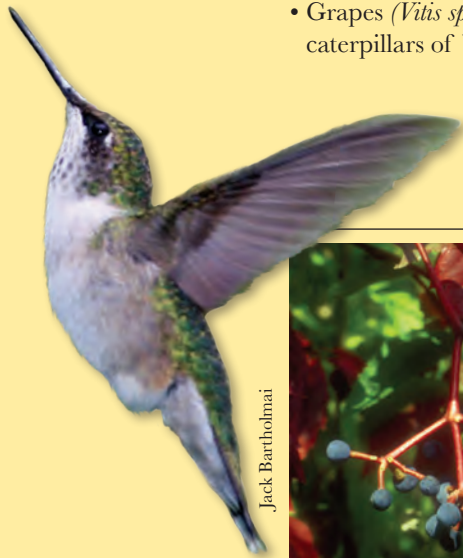
- Greenbriar (*Smilax hispida*).
- Grapes (*Vitis spp.*) – See above under vines for berries.

### Best Vine for Hummingbirds

- Red Honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*).

### Best Vine Hosting Insects for Birds

- Grapes (*Vitis spp.*) – Host 79 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.



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## BEST NATIVE WILDFLOWERS FOR BIRDS

- Asters (*Aster spp.*), the range varies for different species, but asters are found throughout Wisconsin — Seeds eaten by cardinals, goldfinches, sparrows, chickadees, nuthatches, towhees, and Indigo Bunting. Host 112 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Coreopsis (*Coreopsis spp.*), mainly southern half of Wisconsin.
- Purple Coneflowers (*Echinacea spp.*), mainly southern quarter of Wisconsin.
- Joe-pye Weeds (*Eupatorium spp.*), south of Tension Zone, which bisects Wisconsin from northwest to southeast. Provide seeds and also host 42 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria spp.*) – Fruits attract 53 species of birds, including Northern Flicker, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Towhee, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Hosts 81 species of caterpillars and moths.
- Sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*), the range varies for different species, but sunflowers are found throughout Wisconsin — Seeds loved by Mourning Dove, blackbirds,

- chickadees, finches, meadowlarks, sparrows, and White-breasted Nuthatch. Host 73 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Blazing Stars (*Liatris spp.*), the range varies for different species, but Blazing Stars are found throughout Wisconsin.



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- Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*, *R. laciniata*) – Favorite of finches; also liked by chickadees, cardinals, sparrows, nuthatches, and towhees. Host 17 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Prairie Dock, Compass Plant, and other Silphiums (*Silphium spp.*), southern half of Wisconsin – Loved by finches.
- Goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*), many wonderful natives throughout Wisconsin, but avoid Canada Goldenrod (*S. canadensis*), which is extremely aggressive and will crowd out most other wildflowers – Loved by finches. Host 115 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.
- Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), primarily south of Tension Zone, which bisects Wisconsin from northwest to southeast. Hosts 19 species of caterpillars of butterflies and moths.



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## BEST NATIVE WILDFLOWERS FOR HUMMINGBIRDS

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- Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*).
- Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*).
- Spotted Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*).
- Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*).
- Turk's Cap Lily (*Lilium superbum*) and Wood Lily (*L. philadelphicum*).
- Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*).
- Lupine (*Lupinus perennis*), mainly south of Tension Zone, which bisects Wisconsin from northwest to southeast.
- Penstemon (*Penstemon grandiflorus*, *P. digitalis*), southern two-thirds of Wisconsin.
- Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*, *P. pilosa*).

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## BEST NATIVE GRASSES FOR BIRDS

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- Bluestems (*Andropogon spp.*) — Seeds of the Big and Little Bluestem are eaten by small birds in winter, including juncos and sparrows.
- Other native prairie and woodland grasses also have seeds that are probably eaten by birds, but specific information is unavailable.

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## WORST WISCONSIN INVASIVE PLANTS

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*Be sure to eliminate these from your birdscaped yard.*

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- Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*).
- Tartarian Honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*).
- Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*).
- Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*).
- Crown Vetch (*Coronilla varia*).
- Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and Glossy Buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*).
- White Sweet Clover (*Melilotus alba*) and Yellow Sweet Clover (*Melilotus officinalis*).
- Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).
- Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*).
- Musk or Nodding Thistle (*Carduus nutans*).



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## RECOMMENDED READING

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- Martin, A.C., H.S. Zim, and A.L. Nelson. 1951. *American Wildlife and Plants, A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits*. Dover Publications. New York. Specific information on the plants birds eat.
- Nowak, Mariette. 2012. *Birdscaping in the Midwest*. University of Wisconsin Press. Madison, Wisconsin. Excellent guide to gardening with native plants to attract birds.
- Piaskowski, V.D., K.M. Williams, G.K. Boese, and P.A. Brookmire. 2008. *The Birds Without Borders – Aves Sin Fronteras® Recommendations for Landowners: How to Manage Your Land to Help Birds* (Wisconsin, Midwest and eastern United States edition). Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, Inc., and Zoological Society of Milwaukee. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A. Recommends native plants for birds based on research in Wisconsin.
- Salwey, M.K., J.L. Hutchens, T.L. Peterson, K. Kearns, and T. Marty. 1998. *So What Should I Plant? Trees, Shrubs and Vines with Wildlife Values*. Publication WM-223-98. Bureau of Wildlife Management, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Madison, Wisconsin. [http://dnr.wi.gov/files/pdf/pubs/wm/wm0223\\_a.pdf](http://dnr.wi.gov/files/pdf/pubs/wm/wm0223_a.pdf). Recommends native plants for birds and wildlife.
- Stokes, Donald and Lillian. 1998. *Bird Gardening Book*. Little Brown. Boston. Excellent in overall coverage.
- Tallamy, Douglas W. *A Case for Native Gardening – Bringing Nature Home*. <http://bringingnaturehome.net/>. See recommendations for herbaceous and woody plants.
- Tallamy, Douglas W. 2007. *Bringing Nature Home*. Timber Press, Inc. Portland, Oregon. A compelling argument for the use of native plants in gardens and landscapes.
- Zickefoose, Julie. 2001. *The Bird-Friendly Backyard, Natural Gardening for Birds*. Rodale Press. Emmaus, Pennsylvania. An excellent book, giving a wealth of details on landscaping for birds.



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