

PLANTING TO ATTRACT AND FEED BIRDS

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I am a bird watcher who has concluded that most enthusiasts go away from their homes to watch birds primarily because they have little or nothing to encourage visits from our feathered friends. The problem does not seem to be one of space but one of adequate cover and natural foods. This situation can be corrected by planned planting, so that certain types of shrubbery and trees will not only have attractive blossoms in the spring, but will supply very important berries and fruit in the fall and winter.

Many people offer grain and special seeds to draw birds into their yards. But when the birds have grown accustomed to the easy living and hand-outs, the people either neglect their feeders or move away, leaving the victims of too much relief to their own devices, usually at a time when food is scarce. How much better it would have been to let nature supply the food, helped by man through planting proper trees and shrubs that provide both nourishment and shelter when the mercury falls.

We have feeders for sunflower and thistle seed, suet holders, and all kinds of contraptions designed to attract most species of birds, plus, of course, our furry, squirrely friends. However, none of these has ever provided the thrill I had when I looked out the kitchen window to see four grouse feeding in the hawthorn tree in our front yard and then looked in the back yard to see another partridge in an American cranberry bush.

Pine Grosbeaks visit us frequently, attracted by the bright red hawthorn berries. Pheasants vary their meager winter diet by working the multiflora hedge and by picking up the cranberries the partridges have left.

In the early fall, we have many Robins feasting on the berries in our dogwood trees. When these are gone, the Robins move to the black alders, cottoneasters, and finally the crabapple trees. They stay with us until the cold forces them to move along, though during some winters a few hardy souls stay on to keep our Cardinals company.

The cones on the spruces at the northwest corner of our house are free lunch-counters for goldfinches and are also enjoyed by Pine Siskins when they come down from the far north. The chickadees hide in the pine cover behind the house, and the Mourning Doves enjoy the warmth of the rising sun in the red pines, which they also use as shelter from the wind.

There are no secrets about what shrubs or trees to plant; the Massachusetts Audubon Society has excellent pamphlets on the subject. All that is really needed is the interest, supported by a shovel, a small hole, a little water, plus tender loving care. As a reward, you will have living color outside your window on even the dreariest winter day. Cedars, junipers, bittersweet, arrowroot and mountain ash are other native trees and shrubs that rate high as sources of food and shelter.

Isn't it about time that all of us took a good, clear look at where we live? We should begin returning to the land the natural things of beauty that we have spent so many years eliminating.