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Planting for Wild Birds

Here are a few basics to keep in mind when deciding to welcome birds into your yard: a) different kinds of birds eat different kinds of food. Some are nectar-feeders, some eat seeds and berries, while others eat insects. If you want to attract specific birds, find out what type of feeder they are so you'll know what to plant; b) dense plantings provide shelter from weather and predators. Trees and tall shrubs provide resting places, singing perches and nesting sites; c) water is essential for hydration and bathing.

Here are some suggestions for planting. For ease of growing we'll focus on native plants and well-adapted non-natives.

Plants with seeds and berries:

Netleaf Hackberry, *Celtis reticulata*: a large tree that grows along streams and washes from 2500 to 6000 feet. Hackberries provide orange to purple berries in late summer as well as shelter and cover.

Deergrass, *Muhlenbergia rigens*: grasses are a great addition to your bird-welcoming yard, providing cover, nesting materials and seeds. The white-crowned sparrow is particularly fond of the seeds of deergrass.

Firethorn, *Pyracantha* species: a dense, thorny shrub that provides cover and nesting sites and an abundance of red-orange berries in fall and winter. The berries attract Northern Mockingbirds, finches, thrashers and sparrows.

Four-wing Saltbush, *Atriplex canescens*: a great shrub for cover that also produces large amounts of seed to attract quail, doves, finches and towhees.

Nectar producing plants:

Agave, *Agave palmeri*: when Agave finally flowers after 5-10 years, the 15' flower spike draws in many types of birds for its nectar and the insects also attracted to the bloom.

Fairy Duster, *Calliandra californica*: an all-around winner with nectar for hummingbirds, seed for quail, doves and finches, soft dried flower heads for nest lining, and attractive to insects for the insect eating birds.

Desert Willow, *Chilopsis linearis*: in September this small tree produces a profusion of nectar-producing, large, white to purple flowers. It also attracts birds searching for insects among the blossoms.

Penstemon, *Penstemon* species: one of the best perennials for attracting hummingbirds with their colorful, tubular flowers. The different species offer a range of color and mature heights so it's easy to find one that's right for your yard.

Autumn Sage, *Salvia greggii*: a small evergreen shrub with showy flowers from spring through fall. The red colored varieties are best for attracting hummingbirds.

Red Yucca, *Hesperaloe parviflora*: long –blooming with red tubular flowers that are reliable hummingbird magnets.

If you lack space for a large garden area, you can still attract hummingbirds to your containers if you fill them with annuals such as petunias, nasturtiums, salvia, begonias and impatiens. Add a moving water source, which all the birds will appreciate, and watch to see who comes to visit! Be sure to have a field guide to identify your visitors.

Here are some resources to help you get started:

*Desert Bird Gardening published by the Arizona Native Plant Society and Tucson Audubon Society.

*Native Plants for High-Elevation Western Gardens by Janice Busco and Nancy R. Morin published in partnership with The Arboretum at Flagstaff: plant entries list wildlife attracted to that plant.

*Bird-by-Bird Gardening: The Ultimate Guide to Bringing in Your Favorite Birds-Year after Year by Sally Roth

*National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat Program:

<http://www.nwf.org>