



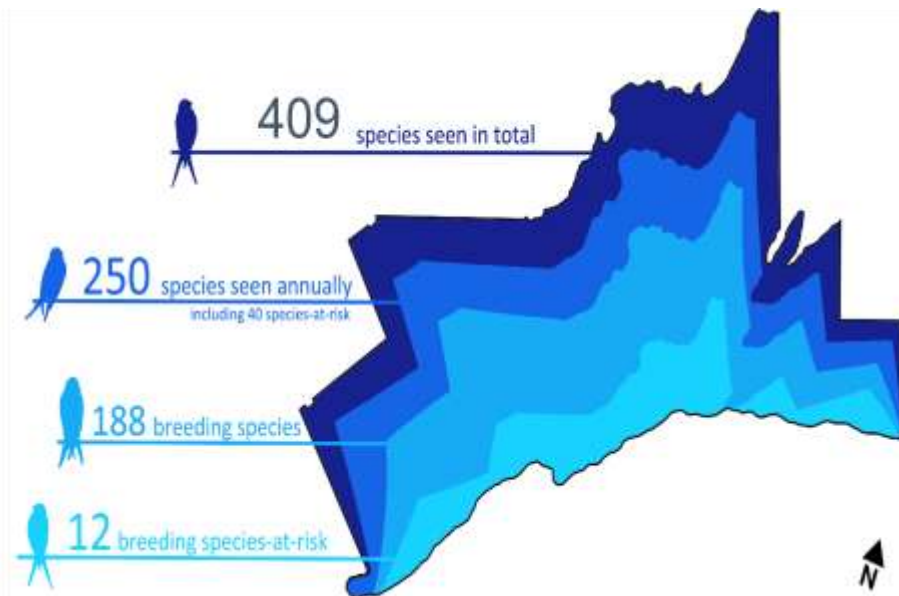
# BUILDING A BIRD GARDEN IN TORONTO



BIRDS IN THE CITY

Birds are a key part of our ecosystem, helping to pollinate plants, disperse seeds, naturally control pests, and recycle nutrients back into the earth. Their lively vocals and captivating personalities also animate outdoor spaces and spark the imagination. Sadly, the loss of wild habitat is greatly reducing many bird populations. By choosing to make urban areas more bird-friendly, all of us have the opportunity to help keep the skies full of song. This guide will help you meet the needs of a variety of local and migratory bird species at your home, school, or workplace.

TORONTO BY THE NUMBERS



Source map by Wiki user Mortadelo2005.

GET INVOLVED: GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT



Every winter, birdwatchers across North America spend four days identify and count birds in their neighbourhoods to create a continent-wide snapshot of the state of their local birds. It's a fun activity for all ages that helps the birds! Sign up at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org)

Birds on front cover, from top, clockwise: Ruby-throated Hummingbird, American Robin, Mourning Dove, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee.

Cover photos by Mark Peck, except American Robin photo by Steve Burt.

NEIGHBOURHOOD BIRDS

Here are some of our feathered neighbours you may attract to a bird-friendly garden space:



Northern Cardinal ♂



Northern Cardinal ♀



Black-capped Chickadee



Mourning Dove



House Finch ♂



House Finch ♀



American Goldfinch (♂ left; ♀ right)



Blue Jay



Dark-eyed Junco



Red-breasted Nuthatch



White-breasted Nuthatch



American Robin



White-throated Sparrow



House Sparrow (♀ right; ♂ left)



Downy Woodpecker ♂ (females lack red)



Hairy Woodpecker ♂ (females lack red)

Photos by Mark Peck.

### BUILDING A BIRD GARDEN – FOOD AND WATER

Offering a variety of plants will help your garden keep up with changes in birds' seasonal diet, from bugs to seeds to berries and nuts. Avoid pesticides to ensure your garden is safe for birds and pollinators.

Blooms from wildflowers, flower beds, and flowering trees and shrubs all attract the insects that many birds rely on as a high-quality food source in the summer months. Allowing some of these flowers to go to seed (e.g. coneflowers, sunflowers, and Black-eyed Susans) will continue to feed finches and sparrows in the fall. Larger birds such as robins and waxwings will appreciate juniper and sumac seeds, while also making use of the long-lasting berries these plants provide in winter. Other berry-producing species such as dogwood, elderberry, hackberry, holly, and blueberry add to fall and winter food supplies for birds. Of course, birds always need fresh water, so consider adding a bird bath or water bowl and change the water regularly. The sound of a running water feature will attract many birds, just remember to continue to offer water through the season. Also consider leaving a patch of bare ground for birds to take dust paths and to provide nesting habitat for native solitary bees.

### BIRD FEEDERS

Set up a bird feeding station from fall to spring to help birds through the lean winter months and draw birds to your garden where you can appreciate and observe them. There are several styles of feeders that appeal to different types of birds; for example, tube feeders with small perches and holes exclude larger birds like jays, while tray feeders attract ground-foraging birds like doves. Each species has its preferences for food, but sunflower seed feeders, nyjer seed feeders and suet are popular with a variety of birds. Refill regularly and follow the instructions on how to keep your feeder clean. In the summer, after you've cleaned and put away your suet and tube feeders, consider putting out sugar water feeders to attract nectar-eating hummingbirds, or provide grape jelly or fruit slices on a tray to attract orioles and tanagers. Hang your feeders well back from windows or pressed against windows to reduce the risk of birds colliding with the glass and injuring themselves.

#### GET INVOLVED: PROJECT FEEDERWATCH



The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



# Project FeederWatch

Have a bird feeder? Sign up for Project FeederWatch and you'll receive materials to help you identify and count the birds visiting your feeder. Submit your results to contribute to a continent-wide research project. [www.FeederWatch.org](http://www.FeederWatch.org)



Tube (nyjer seed)

Finches, Sparrows, small species



Hopper

Finches, Cardinals, Chickadees, many species



Suet

Woodpeckers, Nuthatches, Jays, many species



Tray

Doves, Blackbirds, Sparrows, many species



Sugar water

Hummingbirds, Orioles, Woodpeckers

Left to right, top to bottom:  
American Goldfinch (♀ right; ♂ left), Rose-breasted Grosbeak ♂ (photo by H. Michael Miley), Northern Flicker (photo by Flickr user frted), Evening Grosbeak ♂, Ruby-throated Hummingbird ♀. All other photos by Mark Peck.

**BUILDING A BIRD GARDEN – HABITAT**

Whether they're using your garden as a migration rest-stop or looking for a territory to call their own, birds of all kinds need places where they're protected from the elements and from predators.

By choosing plants such as dogwood, honeysuckle, and greenbrier, you can provide dense thickets where songbirds can safely perch and nest. Taller trees provide places to sing, while stands of tall grass and carpets of fern create cover for birds that spend most of their time on the ground. Have a dead or dying tree? Consult with an arborist about leaving it up as a snag, which is highly prized habitat for perching birds and cavity-nesters. Use evergreens like juniper and cedar to offer winter shelter, or create instant habitat by leaving out cut branches or an old Christmas tree.

Help birds stay safe in your new bird haven by keeping cats indoors. Free-roaming cats are responsible for the majority of the human-related bird deaths in Canada, killing between 100 and 350 million birds every year<sup>1</sup>. In southern Canada, cats kill 2-7% of birds every year<sup>1</sup>. Keep both cats and birds safe by letting your cats enjoy the outdoors with a leash or in an enclosed porch. Learn more at [www.catsandbirds.ca](http://www.catsandbirds.ca).

In addition to being careful with your feeder placements, you can help keep birds safe by putting bird-safe film on your windows to prevent window-strikers. Approximately 25 million birds in Canada die a year as a result of collision with windows, and 90% of these are likely due to houses<sup>2</sup>. Learn more about how you can bird-proof your windows at [www.flap.org](http://www.flap.org).

NESTING BOXES

You can supplement natural nesting habitat with boxes or cups. Many small birds such as Black-capped Chickadees, Tree Swallows, Eastern Bluebirds, and House Wrens use nest boxes, while other birds such as Barn Swallows and even larger birds like American Robins use nest cups. Research the right kind of box and placement for the types of birds you see in your yard. Birds are very particular about the size and shape of boxes and entrance holes for good reason – they need to be sure that predators won’t be able to get in and fledglings will be able to get out! Choose nest boxes that open, allowing for annual cleaning, and avoid boxes with a perch, as these enable predators to enter.



Eastern Bluebird ♂; photo: Roger H. Goun

Nest Box – Smaller Holes  
Wrens, Black-capped Chickadees, Nuthatches, Tree Swallows, Eastern Bluebirds



Great Crested Flycatcher; photo: Mark Peck

Nest Box – Larger Hole  
Northern Flickers (fill with wood shavings), Eastern Screech-Owls, Great Crested Flycatchers



Barn Swallow; photo: americanartifacts.com

Nest Cup  
Barn Swallows, Cliff Swallow, Robins, Eastern Phoebes, House Finches

**GET INVOLVED: PROJECT NESTWATCH**



# Project NestWatch

Is there a bird nesting in your yard, or somewhere else you can visit every 3-5 days? Join citizen scientists across Canada in learning how to properly monitor a nest and submit your observations at [www.birdscanada.org](http://www.birdscanada.org)

<sup>1</sup>Blancher, P. 2013. Estimated number of birds killed by house cats (*Felis catus*) in Canada. *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 8(2):3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ACE-00557-080203>

Machtans, C. S., C. H. R. Wedeles, and E. M. Bayne. 2013. A first estimate for Canada of the number of birds killed by colliding with building windows. *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 8(2):6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ACE-00568-080206>

PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Birds love diversity, so adding a variety of plant species to your garden will attract them. Create “levels” in your garden by using plants of different heights to provide shelter for birds. Similarly, clump plants together to create hiding places, and to make foraging easier on birds and pollinators. Finally, think of the seasons when you choose your plants – with some planning, you can provide some benefit for birds across all four seasons. Here are some readily available native plants to consider in your bird garden:

PLANTS FOR BIRDS – GRASSES

**Switch Grass** (*Panicum virgatum*)

Produces seeds for fall migrants and shelters ground-nesters.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 2 m	Medium to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: cover Fall: seeds



**Little Blue Stem Grass** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

Produces seeds for sparrows and shelters for ground-nesters.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
120cm	Well-drained, dry to medium soil	Full sun	Summer: cover Fall: seeds



PLANTS FOR BIRDS – PERENNIAL WILDFLOWERS

**Butterfly Milkweed** (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

Attracts insects for insectivorous birds.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Well-drained, sandy, dry to medium soil	Full sun	Summer: flowering Fall: flowering



**Wild Blue Flag Iris** (*Iris versicolor*)

Attracts hummingbirds. Good for rain gardens and pond borders.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Medium to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: flowering



**Cardinal Flower** (*Lobelia cardinalis*)

Attracts hummingbirds. Good for rain gardens.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
120 cm	Medium to wet soil; consistently moist soil.	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: flowering Fall: flowering



**Bee Balm** (*Monarda didyma*)

Attracts hummingbirds.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Medium to wet soil; consistently moist soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: flowering



**Wild Geranium** (*Geranium maculatum*)

Produces seeds for ground-foraging seed-eaters, including doves.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Spring: flowering Summer: seeds Fall: seeds



**Black-eyed Susan** (*Rudbeckia fulgida*)

Produces seeds for seed-eaters, including finches and winter birds.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Well-drained, dry to medium soil	Full sun	Summer: flowering Fall: seeds Winter: seeds



**Pale Coneflower** (*Echinacea pallida*)

Produces seeds for seed-eaters, including finches and sparrows.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Well-drained, dry to medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: flowering Fall: seeds Winter: seeds



**Purple Coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*)

Attracts insects for hummingbirds; produces seeds for seed-eaters.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Well-drained, dry to medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: flowering Fall: flowering Winter: seeds





**Woodland Sunflower** (*Helianthus divaricatus*)

Produces seeds for seed-eaters, including doves, finches, titmice.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
180 cm	Well-drained, sandy, dry to medium soil	Partial shade	Summer: flowering Winter: seeds



**Wild Columbine** (*Aquilegia canadensis*)

Attracts hummingbirds.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: flowering Winter: seeds



PLANTS FOR BIRDS – SHRUBS, TREES, AND VINES

**Common Juniper** (*Juniperus communis*)

Produces seeds for seed-eaters, including waxwings and robins.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
< 1 – 4.5 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun	Fall: seeds Winter: seeds



**Silky Dogwood** (*Cornus amomum*)

Produces fruits for fall migrants and shelters nesting birds.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
2 – 3.5 m	Well-drained, medium to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Spring: cover Summer: cover Fall: fruits



**Highbush Blueberry** (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)

Produces fruits enjoyed by robins, catbirds, tanagers and more.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
2 – 3.5 m	Acidic, medium to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Spring: flowering Summer: fruits Fall: fruits



**Gray Dogwood** (*Cornus racemosa*)

Produces fruits and shelters nesting birds, such as yellow warblers.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
3 – 4.5 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Spring: cover Summer: cover Fall: fruits



**American Hazelnut** (*Corylus americana*)

Produces fruits for woodpeckers, jays, turkeys; grouse eat catkins.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
3 – 5 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits Winter: closed catkins



**Winterberry Holly** (*Ilex verticillata*)

Produces late fruit that attracts robins, waxwings, and more.

Requires male plants.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
1 – 3.5 m	Acidic, medium to wet soil; tolerates boggy soils	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits Winter: fruits



**Northern Bayberry** (*Myrica pensylvanica*)

Produces berries for Yellow-rumped Warblers; seeds and cover.

Requires male plants.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
1.5 – 3 m	Well-drained, dry to medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Summer: cover Fall: fruits Winter: seeds



**Nannyberry** (*Viburnum lentago*)

Produces fruit eaten by thrashers and waxwings in the winter.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
4 – 5 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits Winter: fruits



**Common Witch-hazel** (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

Produces seeds that become scattered around the plant.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
4.5 – 6 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: seeds



**Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*)

Produces fruit that attracts migratory songbirds such as thrushes.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
2 – 3.5 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits



**American Plum** (*Prunus americana*)

Attracts insect- and nectar-eating birds and grouse; provides cover.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
4.5 – 7.5 m	Well-drained, dry to medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Spring: flowers, cover Summer: fruits, cover



**Black Gum; Tupelo** (*Nyssa sylvatica*)

Attracts insectivorous birds; produces fruits for migrants.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
9 – 15 m	Medium to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Spring: flowering Fall: fruits



**Roughleaf Dogwood** (*Cornus drummondii*)

Produces fruit for fall migrants, and attracts ducks if near water.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
2 – 4.5 m	Medium to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits



**Maple Leaf Viburnum** (*Viburnum acerifolium*)

Produces fruit enjoyed by sparrows and cardinals.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
1 – 2 m	Well-drained, medium soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits



**Virginia Creeper** (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

Produces fruit for fruit-eating songbirds.

Height	Soil	Sun	Season
Vine	Dry to wet soil	Full sun/ part shade	Fall: fruits



**YEAR-ROUND FOOD FOR BIRDS**

**Flowers for birds**      **Seeds for birds**      **Fruits for birds**

Grasses Common Name	Spring		Summer		Fall		Winter	Comments
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late		
Switch Grass								Flowers July to September
Little Blue Stem Grass								Flowers August to October

Wildflowers Common Name	Spring		Summer		Fall		Winter	Comments
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late		
Butterfly Milkweed								Flowers June to September
Wild Blue Flag Iris								Flowers May to August
Cardinal Flower								Flowers July to September
Dwarf Bee Balm								Flowers July to August
Wild Geranium								Flowers April to June
Black-eyed Susan								Flowers June to September
Pale Coneflower								Flowers June to July
Purple Coneflower								Flowers June to August
Woodland Sunflower								Flowers July to September
Wild Columbine								Flowers April to July

Shrubs and Trees Common Name	Spring		Summer		Fall		Winter	Comments
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late		
Common Juniper								
Highbush Blueberry								Flowers May to June
Silky Dogwood								Flowers May to June
Gray Dogwood								Flowers May to July
American Hazelnut							Catkins	Flowers March to April

Shrubs, Trees, Vines Common Name	Flowers for birds		Seeds for birds				Fruits for birds		Comments
	Spring		Summer		Fall		Winter		
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late			
Winterberry Holly				■	■	■	■	Both ♂ & ♀ plants needed for fruit	
Northern Bayberry				■	■	■	■	Both ♂ & ♀ plants needed for fruit	
Nannyberry						■	■	Flowers May to June	
Common Witch-hazel						■		Flowers Sept. to Nov.	
Spicebush					■	■		Flowers March to April	
American Plum	■	■		■				Flowers April to June	
Black Gum; Tupelo	■	■		■	■			Flowers April to May	
Roughleaf Dogwood			■	■	■			Flowers April to June	
Maple Leaf Viburnum				■	■	■		Flowers May to July	
Virginia Creeper				■	■	■			

Plant photo credits (in order of appearance): Matt Lavin; Flickr user TallGrass\_IA; Derek Ramsey; Danielle Langlois; Flickr user Melytu; Warren Lynn, Vicki DeLoach; F.D. Richards; Flickr user dbarronoss; Wikimedia user RI; Dan Mullen; Sage Ross; Joan Simon; Michael Wolf; Wikimedia user Aconagua; Wikimedia user Mitternacht90; Superior National Forest; Superior National Forest; Flickr user Maggi\_94; Vojtech Zavadil; Flickr user per\_verdonk

Birds on back cover: Northern Cardinal ♂ (top), House Wren (bottom). Photos by Mark Peck.



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