

Birds require food, cover and nesting sites to survive. Careful choice of plants and provision of other features such as ponds, will help you create a haven for wildlife in your garden.

The more varied you can make your garden, the better it will be for wildlife. Inclusion of shrubs, a hedge, climbers, and trees will create habitats to suit many different birds. Herbaceous plants and a lawn are other valuable features.

Choose a selection of shrubs and trees that provide insect food, and berries or fruit for as long a period as possible. Inclusion of thorny plants and some evergreens provide shelter and safe nesting sites. This leaflet lists some of the useful shrubs, trees and climbers for a wildlife garden. Due to limited space, growing conditions and flowering and fruiting periods are not given. These can be gleaned from many good gardening books.

Avoid planting non-native, invasive species which can cause a conservation problem if they spread into sensitive habitats. Non-native pond plants are a particular problem, as they can be moved into watercourses by birds, cats and dogs, travel many miles and may blanket large areas of water or riverbank. Never tip garden rubbish into a semi-natural habitat as the seeds can spread. Compost your green rubbish and take the rest to a local tip, where it can be disposed of properly.

## Trees

Native trees are preferable, since most of them provide insects in the breeding season as well as seeds in winter. Oaks and beeches grow into big trees and are only suitable for large gardens.

**Alder** *Alnus glutinosa*\* or non-native *A. incana* and *A. cordata* are suitable for damp or wet sites. The 'cones' attract siskins, goldfinches and redpolls in winter.

Alders produce long, hanging catkins in early spring.

**Birch** *Betula pendula*\* supports good quantities of insects, including caterpillars, which attract many birds. The seeds attract redpolls. Birch grows best on well drained sites.

**Willows** – goat willow *Salix caprea*\* and *S. daphnoides* produce catkins in early spring, attracting insects eaten by birds. Willow leaves, particularly those of the goat willow, are eaten by many kinds of caterpillar.

**Oak** *Quercus robur*\* supports a rich variety and quantity of insects, including many caterpillars which provide food for young tits and other birds. The acorns

are eaten by wood pigeons, jays, great spotted woodpeckers and nuthatches.

**Beech** *Fagus sylvatica*\* supports only small quantities of insects, but the 'masts' (nuts) are eaten by tits, chaffinches, bramblings, great spotted woodpeckers and nuthatches.

**Rowan/mountain ash** *Sorbus aucuparia*\* the normal red-berried form is best for birds.

**Whitebeam** *Sorbus* species are small trees with silvery undersides to the leaves. They produce white flowers in May and red berries in the autumn. Free fruiting species include *S. intermedia*, *S. x kewensis* and *S. sargentiana*.

**June-berry** *Amelanchier leavis* is a small tree that produces white blossom in spring and is best grown on light, acid soils. The blackish purple fruits ripen in July and are especially popular in dry weather with thrushes and warblers, such as blackcaps.

**Crab apples** *Malus sylvestris*\*, varieties 'Golden Hornet', 'John Downie', 'Lady Northcliffe' and *M. sargentii* are all good sources of food.

**Cherries** – bird cherry *Prunus padus*\* and wild cherry *P. avium*\* are amongst the earliest fruit to ripen, and are sought after by many species of birds

**European larch** *Larix decidua* is a deciduous conifer with seasonably abundant insects that attract finches. In autumn and winter the cones attract siskins and crossbills.

**Scots pine** *Pinus sylvestris*\* can attract coal tits, gold crests and crossbills. Since it grows tall and has very shallow roots, it is best planted well away from buildings.

## Shrubs

The following shrubs will provide shelter or food, many of them both.

**Barberry** *Berberis* species have spiny branches, which provide good cover, and have bright red fruit and foliage in autumn or blue-black fruit in summer.

*Berberis aggregata*, *B. gagrepainii*, *B. vulgaris*, *B. stenophylla* and *B. thunbergii* are all suitable. For small gardens, *B. wilsoniae* is ideal. *B. darwinii* has evergreen, holly-like leaves and orange flowers.

**Cotoneasters** are a large group of shrubs and trees. All of them are good for wildlife, with the exception of *Cotoneaster conspicuax decora* whose berries birds will ignore. Consult gardening books for size, type and growing requirements.

**Firethorn** *Pyracantha* is a thorny shrub that provides good cover and produces masses of white flowers in May. The handsome show of berries in autumn/early winter is very popular with birds. Varieties that

produce red berries are best for birds. It can be grown as a hedge, against a wall or a fence.

**Hawthorn** *Crataegus monogyna*\* can be a hedge or a clipped bush for cover, but should be left unclipped for the berries to develop. Plant the native form.

**Holly** *Ilex aquifolium*\* is grown for berries. Plant female plants of the normal wild form, but for good fruiting there should be a male tree nearby.

**Roses** – *Rosa canina*\* and *R. rubrifolia* are among the species which fruit freely and attract greenfinches.

**Elder** *Sambucus nigra*\* produces black berries and *S. racemosa* red berries.

**Spindle** *Euonymus europaeus*\* robins take the fruit of the native spindle.

**Dogwood** *Cornus sanguinea*\* is a deciduous shrub whose berries are taken by a wide variety of birds.

**Butterfly bush** *Buddleia globosa* attracts large quantities of insects, which in turn are taken by birds. *B. davidii* is invasive.

**Juniper** *Juniperus communis*\* supports spiders and other insects, and provides well protected nest sites.

**Gorse** *Ulex europaeus*\* is an attractive shrub whose thorny stems provide birds with secure nests.

**Lavender** flowers attract butterflies and bees, and seeds are taken by goldfinches.

**Guelder rose** *Viburnum opulus*\* and the dwarf variety *compactum* have white flowers that attract insects, followed by red berries.

**Privet** *Ligustrum vulgare*\* forms a semi-evergreen hedge for cover, and its berries are taken by birds.

Do not plant the commonly available *L. ovalifolium*.

**Yew** *Taxus baccata*\* is a slow growing and shade tolerant hedge or tree, but for dense cover it needs to be clipped every few years in July. The female trees have sticky red fruit, beloved by mistle and other thrushes.

**Garrya elliptica** is an evergreen shrub with grey-green catkins in winter. It provides useful cover for early nesting birds.

**Forsythia** produces yellow flowers in April, but bullfinches are partial to the buds. Forsythia can be planted as a hedge.

## Climbers and ramblers

**Honeysuckle** *Lonicera periclymenum*\* and *L. caprifolium* both flower in early summer and their fruit attract warblers, thrushes and bullfinches. *L. periclymenum* 'Serotina' flowers in late summer and bears red fruit in September. Also a useful nesting site.

**Ivy** *Hedera helix*\* (the normal wild form) is excellent cover on tree stumps and walls, but may need to be restrained, particularly on buildings. Ivy also provides

good cover for nesting and its flowers are attractive to insects in autumn. The fruits are eaten by wood pigeons, thrushes, robins and blackcaps. **Bramble** *Rubus fruticosus*\* fruit are eaten by blackbirds, warblers and other birds, especially in dry weather, and the seeds are eaten by bullfinches and greenfinches. Forms a useful thicket for nesting wrens and warblers.

**Virginia creeper** *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, *P henryana* and *P tricuspidata* are vigorous climbers for walls and trees. Good nesting and roosting cover.

**Wisteria sinensis** needs to be trained onto a wall or over a pergola, and its sturdy stems can form a good base for a nest. To encourage trusses of lilac flowers, which appear in May and June, the current year's side growth should be cut back to six inches in August.

**Clematis montana** is a rampant climber, which provides excellent nesting sites when grown up a wall or a tree.

### Herbaceous plants

The following bear fruit or seeds that are attractive to garden birds:

**Cornflower** *Centaurea cyanus*\* (annual)

**Evening primrose** *Oenothera* spp mostly biennials

**Forget-me-not** (*Myosotis sylvatica*\* (a short-lived perennial) – bullfinches eat the seeds

**Honesty** *Lunaria annua* (a biennial with silvery fruits useful for winter decoration) – the flowers attract butterflies and hoverflies in autumn

**Michaelmas daisy** *Aster novi-belgii* varieties (perennials) – the flowers attract butterflies and hoverflies in autumn

**Sunflower** *Helianthus annuus*

**Wallflower** *Cheiranthus cheiri* (a short-lived perennial) – leave it to set seed

The fruit and seeds of common weeds, such as chickweed, coltsfoot, dandelion, groundsel and sowthistle are favoured by goldfinches, linnets and greenfinches; nettles by bullfinches. 'Weeds' also harbour insect food for birds.

The seed heads of lettuce and lemon balm attract many birds, especially goldfinches. The flowers of goldenrod *Solidago canadensis* (in autumn) and hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum* (in July) are attractive to insects which, in turn, are food for birds.

\*native in Britain and Ireland

### The lawn and rockery

Blackbirds, song thrushes, robins and starlings will

spend much time on mown lawns in search of earthworms and other invertebrates. Worms continue to be available until the surface dries out later in summer. The lawn is also a source of small flies for dunnocks, pied wagtails, chaffinches and even blue tits. In rural areas, a green woodpecker may visit the lawn or a rockery in search of ants. A rockery may also harbour snails that provide food for song thrushes in dry summer weather.

### Garden ponds

A pond, even a small one, is a valuable place where birds and other wildlife can drink, bathe, and in some cases, feed. A sizeable pond in the garden may attract moorhens, pied wagtails (even grey wagtails in winter) and, if there are fish, a heron. Dragonflies, frogs, toads and newts breed in garden ponds. An RSPB leaflet Ponds for wildlife gives information on how to make and plant a pond.

### The RSPB

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[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

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The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way. We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

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## INFORMATION Planting gardens for birds



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