KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Winter Birds”

December 29, 2020

Winter is a good time to see which birds are still in our backyard but what we can do to help them in the cold and snow? There is a wonderful website that will help you locate birds specific to our area as well as their habitat and behavior. We often sight Dark-eyed Juncos and Northern Flickers or even see the ruckus caused by a Steller’s Jay at the bird feeder in our backyard. Detailed birding websites are numerous but I have listed several on our website that will get you started in a new pastime.

Did you know that the little Black-capped Chickadees live in deciduous and mixed forests? In winter chickadees make up the core of mixed-species flocks that also contain nuthatches, kinglets and woodpeckers. They eat at tubes, tray feeders and absolutely love black oil sunflower seeds. Chickadees are cute little acrobatic balls of fluff, and they are fun to watch at the bird feeder.

When trying to attract birds you need to know what they need for food but also what type of shelter and landscaping will make them feel safe. Birds and native plants are made for each other. Native plants are also important hosts for protein-rich native insects like butterfly and moth caterpillars. Most birds have shaped their entire life cycles, including their migrations and feeding habits, around plant communities and the seasonal fruits and insects they serve up. So, isn’t it up to us as gardeners to try to cultivate the right plants?

Select trees, shrubs and vines whose fruit comes into maturity at different times of the year. Also, select shrubs that will provide shelter from harsh weather and ground for foraging

Here is a partial list of trees, shrubs, perennials and grasses that will help provide our feathered friends with natural ‘goodies’ to plant in your landscape to provide what they need to enjoy their visit to Central Oregon.

Planting for fruit:

* **Early Summer Fruit**: [Chokecherries (Prunus),](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/prunus-besseyi-pawnee-buttes) and Manzanita (Arctostaphylos) .
* **Midsummer Fruit**: [Chokeberries (Aronia)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/aronia-melanocarpa-viking-black-chokeberry-tree), and [Currants (Ribes)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/ribes-aureum)
* **Fall Fruit**: Viburnums and Mahonias
* **Winter Fruit**: shrubs such as Native [Barberries (Berberisi)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/berberis-fendleri), Viburnums and trees with persistent fruit\* like Mountain Ash (Sorbus) and female Juniperus (Juniper).

\**Persistent fruit* is a term used to describe fruit that holds on to stems long after it matures. While sometimes initially unpalatable to birds, through winter's freezes and thaws, this fruit becomes an accessible food. One of the benefits of planting a lot of fruiting trees and shrubs is that they also have an abundance of beautiful flowers during the spring season. These nectar-rich flowers are of tremendous value to honeybees and hummingbirds.

Planting for Seeds:

**Seed-Producing Perennials**: [Echinops (Globe Thistle)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/echinops-banaticus-blue-glow), [Eriogonum (Sulfur buckwheat)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/perennial-plants/unique-plants/eriogonum-umbellatum-v-aureum), [Gaillardia (Blanket Flower)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/perennial-plants/gaillardia), [Helianthus (Sunflower)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/helianthus-maximiliana-santa-fe), , [Blazing Star (Liatris)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/perennial-plants/liatris), [Rudbeckia (Black Eyed Susan)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/perennial-plants/rudbeckia-black-eyed-susan) and [Ratibida (Prairie coneflower)](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/ratibida-pinnata) are among the best.

[**Ornamental Grasses** **and Sedges**](https://www.highcountrygardens.com/perennial-plants/ornamental-grass)**:** such as Andropogon (Big Bluestem), Carex (Sedges), Schizachyrium scoparium (Little Bluestem)

Don’t be in a hurry to cut herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses to the ground during fall garden clean-up! Leave seed heads standing – these are essential for feeding birds in your winter garden. Standing plants provide motion and texture and color to the drab winter landscape. Wait as late as possible in the spring to remove top growth and compost. Standing dead stems provide protection for adult insects and their egg masses which help beneficial like praying mantis, Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) and many others to overwinter and reproduce the following year.

**Year-Round Water Sources -** Dependable water sources are essential for songbirds. This is especially true in our drier climate. They need water for drinking and bathing. In the wintertime, I use an immersion heater in my birdbath prevent constant freezing—the primary goal of your artificial water supply is reliability when all other sources are frozen.

**Bird Feeders -** Winter is a good time to supplement bird diets, because the shortened days cut down on the time birds have to find enough food to get them safely through the long winter nights. I generally use black sunflower seed and millet or thistle, which takes care of pretty much all birds who are either permanent residents or who might migrate to my area in the winter time.

Keep in mind that different birds like to feed at different heights; In harsher weather conditions, birds prefer more sheltered locations; and a word of caution: once you start providing seed for birds, you'll need to continue throughout the cold season.

In summary:

* Plan a garden to attract birds by creating densely concentrated plantings that provide an oasis for birds.
* The work you put into making your garden healthy (soil amendments, regular watering and fertilizer) raises the health of your plants and the quality of life for a variety of bird species.
* Even a small garden of few plants looks like a good place for a bird to call home.

Remember, birds aren't picky about garden styles the way we humans are—whether your personal style is a regimented perennial border, a wonder of wild flowers or something in between, chances are good that the birds will come flocking to your garden.

For answers to all your gardening questions, please visit our website: www.gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It. Thanks for listening.

Resources:

<http://www.ebird.org> for a printable check list, photos and even birding hot spot

<http://www.ecaudubon.org>

<https://www.27east.com/home-garden/doug-tallamy-to-present-a-chickadees-guide-to-gardening-1532496/>

<http://nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/Plants> - Just type in a zip code and discover, by county, all the native flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs that support local wildlife, and discover all the local moths and butterflies.