

Attracting Birds with the Right Plants

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Birds are always welcome in the winter landscape. The right type of food and feeder can assure a steady stream of visitors all season. The right plants can also welcome a wide variety of birds by providing both food and cover.

For years gardeners have planted **crabapples** for spring flowers and fall fruit crops. Most of the newer selections have smaller fruit and they feed birds while they add to the color display. The Sargent crabapple is a favorite, with its pure white spring blossoms and deep red fruit that persists well into the winter. Other varieties like Snowdrift and White Angel also have persistent red fruit.

Many **viburnums** are noted for their fruit crops in the summer and early fall. A few, however, produce fruit that persist into the winter. The American cranberry bush viburnum produce juicy red fruit that holds well into the winter to feed a variety of birds.



Virginia creeper

Red stem dogwood develops a rich crop of purple-blue berries. The fruit is very abundant on mature plants, so it often serves as an excellent food.

The **hawthorns** have been used for years as a source of winter food. The total genus produces edible fruit attractive to many species, but not all hawthorns are well suited to a landscape setting. Two useful hawthorns are Washington and Winter King. Both trees produce abundant crops of bright red to orange-red fruit in the



Snowdrift crabapple



American cranberry bush viburnum



Washington hawthorn



Juniper berries

fall. The quantity is sufficient to last through a number of feedings by numerous bird species.

Vines can also provide both cover and food for birds. Thick covering of stems and foliage on a wall or trellis can make ideal nesting sites. Virginia creeper and Boston ivy both form heavy leaf cover in the summer months. American bittersweet produces orange-red berries that are highly ornamental in fall and sources of food in winter. The Virginia creeper has outstanding fall foliage color and along with Boston ivy produces heavy crops of blue-black fruit that persists well into December.

Evergreens are particularly desirable in landscape designs as well as for yearly cover for many birds. During spring and summer the dense foliage provides protection from danger, and in winter it protects birds from the elements. Juniper, firs, hemlock and spruce all have the density necessary for seasonal protection.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
UNL Extension NebGuide G1572
"Landscape Plants for Wildlife"
available online at <http://ian-rpubs.unl.edu/wildlife/g1572.pdf> or at the extension office.



American bittersweet

Pruning Overgrown Shrubs

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Shrubs are valuable assets to a home landscape. They are often planted for their ornamental characteristics, such as flowers, colorful fall foliage or attractive fruit. They also can provide privacy, block views and attract wildlife. For shrubs to perform well in the landscape, home gardeners must prune them properly. Proper pruning helps to maintain plant health, control or shape plant growth and stimulate flower production.

Many deciduous shrubs, those that lose their leaves in the fall, can be kept healthy and vigorous by removing a few of the largest, oldest stems every two or three years. Unfortunately, many individuals fail to prune their shrubs because of a lack of time, knowledge or courage. As a result of this neglect, shrubs often become leggy and unattractive. Flowering shrubs that are not pruned properly may not bloom well.

Proper pruning can renew or rejuvenate overgrown, deciduous shrubs. One method

is to prune them back over a three-year period. Begin by removing one-third of the large, old stems at ground level in late winter/early spring, March or early April. The following year, again in March or early April, prune out one-half of the remaining old stems. Retain several well-spaced, vigorous shoots and remove all of the others. Finally, remove all of the remaining old wood in late winter/early spring of the third year.

A second way to prune overgrown, deciduous shrubs is to cut them back to within 4 to 6 inches of the ground in March or early April. This severe pruning will induce a large number of shoots to develop during the growing season. In late winter of the following year, select and retain several strong, healthy shoots and remove all others at ground level. Large, overgrown lilacs, honeysuckles, dogwoods, spireas and forsythias may be pruned in this manner. Lilacs rejuvenated by this method will not bloom for three to five years.

Deciduous, formal hedges, those pruned to a definite size and shape, such as privets, that

become open and leggy, also can be rejuvenated by pruning them back to within 4 to 6 inches of the ground in late winter/early spring. To obtain a full, thick hedge, prune the shoots often as they grow back in spring and summer. Also, make sure the base of the hedge is slightly wider than the top to encourage growth close to the ground.

Large, overgrown evergreen shrubs, such as junipers, are a more difficult problem. Junipers possess bare or dead zones in their centers. They can not be pruned back severely because they are incapable of initiating new growth from bare branches. Large, overgrown junipers that have become too large or unattractive, will need to be removed and new shrubs planted.

Although many overgrown, deciduous shrubs can be renewed or rejuvenated, it is much easier to prune them on a regular basis. Regular pruning will keep the shrubs full, healthy and attractive.

Source: Richard Jauron, Iowa State University



Order perennial plants and bulbs now for cut flowers this summer. Particularly good choices are phlox, daisies, coreopsis, asters and lilies.

Check stored bulbs, tubers and corms. Discard any that are soft or diseased.

Order gladiolus corms now for planting later in the spring after all danger of frost has passed. Locate in full sun in well-drained soil.

Branches of forsythia, pussy willow, quince, spirea and dogwood can be forced for indoor bloom. Make long, slanted cuts when collecting the branches and place the stems in a vase of water. Change the water every four days. They should bloom in about three weeks.

Check any vegetables you have in storage. Dispose of any that show signs of shriveling or rotting.

This year plan to grow at least one new vegetable you have never grown before; it may be better than what you are already growing. The new dwarf varieties on the market which use less space while producing more food per square foot may be just what you are looking for.

Send off seed orders early this month to take advantage of seasonal discounts. Some companies offer bonus seeds of new varieties to early buyers.

Do not start your vegetable transplants indoors too early. Six weeks ahead of the expected planting date is early enough for the fast-growth species such as tomatoes. Eight weeks allows enough time for the slower-growing types such as peppers.

Prune fruit trees and grapes in late February or early March after the worst of the winter cold is passed but before spring growth begins.

Late February is a good time to air-layer such house plants as dracaena, dieffenbachia and rubber plant, especially if they have grown too tall and leggy.

Check all five growing factors if your house plants are not growing well. Light, temperature, nutrients, moisture, and humidity must be favorable to provide good growth.

Repair and paint window boxes, lawn furniture, tools and other items in preparation for outdoor gardening and recreational use.