

## **BIRD FRIENDLY YARD PROGRAM**

### Explanations for the Criteria

#### NATIVE PLANTS

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. Arkansas, with its diverse geography, is home to thousands of native plant species. Our native wildlife, including birds, have adapted to the resources provided by Arkansas' native plants. Native wild flowers, shrubs, and trees provide the foliage, nectar, pollen, berries, seeds, and nuts that wildlife requires to survive and thrive.

Across the state, and especially in urban areas, native plants are being displaced by non-native, and often vigorously growing (invasive) species. These invasive exotic plants encroach on natural habitats and do not provide the nutrients many birds need to survive.

*Why are native plants important?* - Ninety percent of all insects are specialized, meaning they share an evolutionary history with native plants and rely on them to survive. Almost all land birds require insects to feed their young. Even seed-eating birds, such as Northern Cardinals, feed their babies insects to ensure their survival. Many insects cannot adapt to eating non-native plants. Fewer native plants means fewer insects, which in turn means fewer baby birds growing to adulthood.

Native plants have adapted to survive in a particular geographic area's climate, soils, rainfall, with the available pollinators and seed dispersers. Because they are indigenous to our region, Arkansas's native plants usually tolerate natural cycles of drought and rain and are welcomed by wildlife, serving an important role in the local ecosystem.

In contrast, grass lawns often require a lot of water, chemicals, and mowing to maintain. Since lawns are often made of only a few types of plants that most animals do not consume, they do not provide much value for wildlife. Replacing grass lawns with native wildflowers, bushes, and trees provides the food, shelter, and cover that help to maintain healthy, natural ecosystems and reduces your time and labor working on the lawn. To assist you in identifying native plants, AAS will provide you with copies of "Tried and True Missouri Native Plants for Your Yard" and "Invasive Species of Southern Forests".

*Where to find native plants?* – In Appendix A you will find a list of recommended sources in Arkansas that specialize in selling native seeds and plants. If you

choose to purchase plants from sources outside of Arkansas, be sure the species you buy are native to our state. Appendix B includes lists of which native plants are suitable for your area. This list is not exhaustive, but only contains the species easiest to find and cultivate while providing food and cover for birds.

### BIRD FOOD AND WATER

Birds do not usually require our bird feeders for survival. We feed birds for our enjoyment and to make them easier to watch. There are times as a result of habitat loss or severe weather during migration when feeders may save lives. Given your interest in a bird-friendly yard, we assume you already do or wish to feed birds.

Birds, and other wildlife, need sources of clean water for many purposes including drinking, bathing, and reproduction. Water sources may include natural features such as ponds, lakes, rivers, springs, and wetlands; or human-made features such as bird baths, created marshes, installed ponds, and rain gardens.

It is critical that you keep bird feeders and baths clean to reduce disease-causing bacteria. Clean feeders at least every two weeks, or more if seed is moldy or you see sick birds. Use hot soapy water or a weak vinegar solution. Regularly clean bird baths with a vinegar solution and a scrub brush before refilling.

### BIRD HAZARD REDUCTION

In recent years we have come to more fully understand the large number of birds that are directly killed or injured by structures, pets, and other hazards introduced into the environment by humans.

Each year in the US millions of birds are killed by hitting windows. Windows reflect the environment around them, so the trees and shrubs in your yard will be what a bird sees in your windows. Birds, especially when startled, will try to fly through this apparently friendly vegetation. A variety of window treatments are available that will make your windows more visible to birds and prevent them from smashing into them. Lights at night can confuse migrating birds. Turning off outdoor lights or directing them downward, and shading indoor upper story windows during migration helps birds and reduces energy use.

[\(http://www.abcbirdtape.org/;](http://www.abcbirdtape.org/)

<http://www.collidescape.org/?gclid=CPad9pCezMcCFQ-raQodNm4BrQ;>

<http://windowalert.com/?gclid=CKXLxqOezMcCFQenaQodS48NtA>

<http://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/featured-stories/15-products-that-prevent-windows-strikes/>

House cats are very popular pets and an integral part of many households. However, cats are not native wildlife, and they are very efficient predators (remember the dead birds, mice, and lizards they bring you as presents). Each year in the US outdoor cats kill millions of birds. Keeping your cats indoors will keep your cat healthy and reduce predation on native wildlife, including birds. Cats roaming outside are subject to catching diseases, being eaten by larger predators, such as coyotes, and getting hit by cars. Cats indoors protects both your cat and wild birds.

See the National Audubon Society/American Bird Conservancy Cats Indoors Program.

<http://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors>,  
<http://cats.about.com/od/indoorsvsoutdoors/tp/keepindoors.htm>

### BIRD COVER, SHELTER, AND NESTING

Birds need places to hide to feel safe from people, predators, and inclement weather. Native vegetation is the perfect cover for wildlife. Shrubs, thickets, and brush piles provide great hiding places within their bushy leaves and thorns. Evergreens give year round cover. Even dead trees work, as they are home to many different animals including some that use tree cavities and branches for nesting and perching. If natural options aren't available for you, consider constructing a birdhouse specifically for the types of birds you would like to attract to your yard.

### PERSONAL ACTIONS

Many people taking small actions can have a large impact.