

PLANT BY NUMBERS:

Hummers and Singers (for the Birds!)

Plants, growing steps, and a sample design to support hummingbirds and songbirds

Meet the Hummingbirds and Songbirds

The native perennials featured in this theme provide insects and spiders for adult birds and developing chicks, nectar for hummingbirds, seeds for foraging songbirds, and plant material for nesting and cover.



PHOTO: KATE ESTROP

Yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) with insect prey



PHOTO: DOUG BERUBE

Northern cardinal chicks (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) waiting for a meal



PHOTO: DOUG BERUBE

Ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) gathering nectar from scarlet beebalm (*Monarda didyma*)



PHOTO: JOE MACINDEWAR

American goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) collecting seed of wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)



PHOTO: HEATHER HOLM

American redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) gathering plant fibers to use as nesting material

Millions of birds migrate through Ohio on their way to their breeding or overwintering grounds.

Over 200 species of breeding birds call Ohio home, including one hummingbird species: the ruby-throated hummingbird.

All of these birds need food to fuel their flight and other adult activities. Breeding birds also gather food for developing chicks.

Seeds, fruits, and insects of all sorts—but especially caterpillars—are vital to bird survival. Natural habitat to nest and rest is also critical.

- Asters (*Symphyotricum* spp.), goldenrods (*Solidago* spp. and *Oligoneuron* spp.), orange coneflowers (*Rudbeckia* spp.), and many other native perennials are host plants for native butterflies and moths. Caterpillars feeding on these host plants are gathered by adult birds and fed to developing chicks.
- Mature seeds from an assortment of perennials are eaten by birds. In addition to asters, goldenrods, and coneflowers, important seed sources include coneflower (*Echinacea* spp.), blazing star (*Liatris* spp.), beebalm and wild bergamot (*Monarda* spp.), perennial sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.), and native perennial grasses (multiple species).
- In spring, ruby-throated hummingbirds migrate to Ohio, where they nest and raise young in trees and shrubs in low-traffic areas. Adults visit an assortment of plants to feed on nectar (flight fuel). Insects and spiders are collected by adults and fed to developing chicks as protein.
- Plant material such as bark, leaves, and fibers from stems and seeds are gathered by birds as they prepare nesting sites.



Planting for Hummingbirds and Songbirds

Use this diagram to plant a small 6'x10' garden plot to attract hummingbirds and songbirds to your Ohio garden, landscape, or nearby park.

The plants in this design provide food, cover, and nesting material for birds. Can't find a specific plant? Use what's available locally including other native species and native cultivars. For a larger space, include more plants, grouping the same species together. The full design is presented here, but even a few plants will provide habitat for hummingbirds and songbirds.

1 square = 1 foot



1. GRANT MCKERCHER | 2. JOSHUA EASTLAKE | 3. D. ELLSWORTH | 4. MIA YAEGER | 5. D. ELLSWORTH | 6. © RAY STEWART
7. ELA119 INAT | 8. ASHER GORBET | 9. LISA BENJAMIN | 10. R. BAUMBACH | 11. JOANN TOLER | 12. LIAM EHMAN
13. JACK VERDIN | 14. EDWDD4@INAT | 15. CANADIANINPIS INAT | 16. @HIKER6

Planting

- The planting site should be in full sun (6 or more hours per day) with good drainage.
- Prepare the site by completely smothering or removing all grass and weeds.
- For best results, consider adding 2 inches of compost or other organic soil amendment to the site before planting.
- Water plants after planting, then water as needed (possibly weekly) if the season is dry.
- These native perennials are relatively drought-tolerant once established.
- Mulch around newly planted perennials with straw, wood mulch, or newspaper to prevent weed growth.

- For south-facing beds, consider planting the native climbing trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) on a fence or trellis on the long northern edge. This plant is a hummingbird favorite.
- Some of the plants in this design can grow to 4 feet or taller. If planting along a walkway or sidewalk, consider softening the front edge by enlarging the planting site and planting the front 18 inches with bird-favorite annuals such as cuphea, fuchsia, lantana, salvia, dwarf sunflower, or zinnia.

Maintenance

- Leave seed heads through winter as food for birds. If

unwanted seedlings sprout in the garden, weed out or share these extra seedlings.

- Cut back dead perennial stalks in late winter to heights of between 12 and 18 inches. These standing stalks can provide nesting material for spring birds as well as nesting sites for wild bees in spring and summer.
- Cup plant is often considered a bully in the garden, so keep a watchful eye if too many cup plants start to establish from seeds or rhizomes.
- Consider adding a bird bath or other water feature to attract even more birds.
- Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides in the garden

to protect insects and birds. Consult your local Ohio State University Extension office for earth-friendly pest management strategies.

- Find your local Extension office.



- This complete set of native perennials is available in 2024 by mail order as the "32 Plant Songbird Garden" from Prairie Nursery.



NATIVE PLANTS FOR HUMMINGBIRDS AND SONGBIRDS

1

RED COLUMBINE
Aquilegia canadensis
(2)



GRANT MCKERCHER

9

PINNATE PRAIRIE CONEFLOWER
Ratibida pinnata
(1)



LISA BENJAMIN

2

BLUE WILD INDIGO
Baptisia australis
(1)



JOSHUA EASTLAKE

10

SWEET CONEFLOWER
Rudbeckia subtomentosa
(1)



R BAUMBACH

3

PURPLE CONEFLOWER
Echinacea purpurea
(1)



D. ELLSWORTH

11

LITTLE BLUESTEM
Schizachyrium scoparium
(4)



JOANN TOLER

4

DENSE BLAZING STAR
Liatris spicata
(2)



MIA YAEGER

12

CUP PLANT
Silphium perfoliatum
(1)



LIAM EHRMAN

5

WILD BERGAMOT
Monarda fistulosa
(2)



D. ELLSWORTH

13

INDIANGRASS
Sorghastrum nutans
(4)



JACK VERDIN

6

STIFF GOLDENROD
Oligoneuron rigida
(1)



© RAY STEWART

14

PRAIRIE DROPSEED
Sporobolus heterolepis
(4)



EDWDDA@INAT

7

FOXGLOVE BEARDTONGUE
Penstemon digitalis
(3)



ELA119 INAT

15

SMOOTH BLUE ASTER
Symphotrichum laeve
(2)



CANADIANINPIS INAT

8

DOWNY PHLOX
Phlox pilosa
(2)



ASHER GORBET

16

NEW ENGLAND ASTER
Symphotrichum novae-angliae
(1)



@HIKER66

The number in parenthesis is the number of plants needed for the design.

Trees and Shrubs for Hummingbirds and Songbirds

Woody plants are used as host plants by many moths and butterflies, making them a vital source of caterpillars for developing chicks. Some native trees and shrubs also provide seeds, fruit, nectar, cover, and nesting sites or materials. Consider growing any of these native plants to invite even more birds to the garden:

- Blueberry (*Vaccinium* spp.) 🦋 217 species
- Cherry (*Prunus* spp.) 🦋 340 species
- Oak (*Quercus* spp.) 🦋 436 species
- Willow (*Salix* spp.) 🦋 289 species

🦋 = number of butterfly and moth species that depend on this host plant
Source: *Garden for Wildlife* by National Wildlife Federation, *Keystone Native Plants*.

Nectar sources for hummingbirds include bottlebrush buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*), red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), and native trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*).



SUSANNA HEIDEMAN

Hummingbird and honeysuckle

Finding Native Plants

Native plants are becoming easier to find and purchase at local nurseries and online. Check with both large and small nurseries as well as mail-order catalogs. To find native plant sales nearby, check with local or regional groups such as arboreta, botanical gardens, nature centers, zoos, county Soil and Water Conservation District offices, and local garden clubs and groups including Master Gardener Volunteers.

Ohio Nurseries Selling Native Plants

- Ohio Native Plant Month's website (ohionativeplantmonth.org/native-plant-sources)
- Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership website (leapbio.github.io/nurseries)



For More Information

- *Native Shrubs: Creating Living Landscapes for Birds, Butterflies, Bees, and Other Beneficials* (free PDF/fact sheet). OSU Extension.
- *Native Trees: Creating Living Landscapes for Birds, Butterflies, Bees, and Other Beneficials* (free PDF/fact sheet). OSU Extension.
- *Native Plant Finder* (website). National Wildlife Federation.



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