

Michigan Native Plants for Bird-Friendly Landscapes



Why go native?

Help baby birds Nearly all landbirds feed their chicks insect larva, but insects have a hard time eating and reproducing on non-native plants. Plant native plants and stay away from the pesticides—baby birds need those little pests to survive!

Pollinators love natives, too Did you know that many pollinators don't or can't use ornamental and non-native plants? Attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and honeybees by adding native flowering plants or better yet—select “host plants” that each species of butterfly and moth requires to reproduce.

Go local Michigan's native plants are unique and beautiful, but many are rare or threatened with extirpation. Keep Michigan unique by planting a Michigan Garden! Bonus: Many natives are drought tolerant and low maintenance.

Healthy habitat for birds = Healthy yard for you Mowed lawns require a lot of environmentally-unfriendly practices to maintain: mowing, fertilizing, herbiciding, and watering. By converting patches of lawn to native gardens, you will reduce your impact on the environment and keep those chemicals and pollutants far away from you and your family.

What are native plants?

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. They are well-adapted to the climate and birds, insects, and wildlife depend on native plants to survive.

Invasive plants are those that are not native to an area and aggressively outcompete native flora. These species degrade Michigan's natural ecosystems and should be removed or avoided when planting new gardens.

How to use this guide

When thinking about bird habitat, it's important to think in layers: from canopy trees to ground cover. Different bird species rely on different layers to forage and nest. So, by providing a greater variety of layers in your yard, you can attract a greater variety of birds.

This guide separates each habitat layer and suggests several native plants for each layer that are known to benefit birds. Specific benefits to birds (produces fruit, provides cover, etc.) are identified for each plant. Growing conditions are included for each plant species to help you select plants best suited for your yard.

The plants featured in this booklet are just a sample of the many native plants available for your area. Ask your local native plant grower for a complete list of species.

Elements of a Bird-Friendly Yard



Snags

provide nesting locations for woodpeckers and other cavity-nesting species.

Vines

provide nesting locations; many produce berries.

Shrubs

provide cover, nectar, and berries; provide nesting locations; attract insects.

Wildflowers

attract pollinators and insects; produce nectar and seeds.

Grasses

provide cover and seeds; attract insects; provide nesting materials.

Nectar Plants

attract hummingbirds and other pollinators.

Canopy Trees

provide nest locations, nectar, berries, mast; attract insects.

Ground Covers

attract insects; many produce nectar and berries.

Water

attracts birds of all kinds. A moving water feature such as a waterfall is very enticing to birds.

Canopy Trees

Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Light			Moisture			Size	Use by Birds						
			Full	Part	Shade	Dry	Med	Wet		C	F	H	L	N	S	
Summer Fruit	Black cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	x	x	x	x	x		50'-100'		x		x			
	Red mulberry	<i>Morus rubra</i>		x	x		x		30'-60'		x			x		
Fall Fruit	Mountain-ash	<i>Sorbus decora</i>		x	x			x	25'-50'		x					
Winter Fruit	Hackberry	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	x	x			x		40'-60'		x			x		
	Hawthorn species	<i>Crataegus spp.</i>	x	x			x	x	20'-35'	x	x		x	x		
	American crabapple	<i>Malus coronaria</i>	x	x			x		15'-25'		x		x			
Seed	Red/Sugar maple	<i>Acer rubrum/saccharum</i>	x	x			x		50'-100'				x	x	x	
	Eastern white pine	<i>Pinus strobus</i>		x			x	x	x	70'-100'	x			x	x	x
Nut / Mast	White oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>	x				x	x		60'-100'				x	x	x
	Bur oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	x				x	x	x	60'-85'				x	x	x
	Northern red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	x					x		60'-100'				x	x	x
Shelter	Eastern red cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	x				x	x		20'-40'	x	x			x	
	Eastern arborvitae	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	x	x				x	x	30'-50'	x					x

Use by Birds Key: C = Cover; F = Fruit; H = Hummingbirds; L = Larval host; N = Nesting location or material; S = Seed

Invasive Trees

Remove or avoid planting these species:

Paul Wray, Iowa State U.*



Black Alder
Alnus glutinosa

James H Müller, USFS*



Black Locust
Robinia pseudoacacia

Jan Samanek, SPA*



Norway Maple
Acer platanoides

Karan A Rawlins, UGA*



Tree-of-Heaven
Ailanthus altissima

*bugwood.org

Shrubs

Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Light			Moisture			Size	Use by Birds						
			Full	Part	Shade	Dry	Med	Wet		C	F	H	L	N	S	
Early summer fruit	Serviceberry, Juneberry	<i>Amelanchier spp.</i>	x	x		x	x		12'-25'		x		x			
	Chokecherry	<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	x	x		x	x		10'-30'		x		x			
Midsummer fruit	Wild black currant	<i>Ribes americanum</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-4'		x					
	Raspberry/blackberry	<i>Rubus spp.</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	3'-6'	x	x		x	x		
	Red elderberry	<i>Sambucus racemosa</i>	x	x		x	x		5'-12'		x			x		
	Lowbush blueberry	<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	1'-2'		x		x			
Fall fruit	Black chokeberry	<i>Aronia prunifolia</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-6'		x					
	Alternate-leaved dogwood	<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>	x	x			x		12'-25'		x		x			
Winter fruit	Fragrant sumac	<i>Rhus aromatica</i>	x				x	x	4'-5'		x					
	Winged sumac	<i>Rhus copallina</i>	x				x	x	6'-12'		x					
Nesting	Speckled alder	<i>Alnus incana</i>	x	x				x	x	6'-25'					x	x
	Pasture rose	<i>Rosa carolina</i>	x	x			x	x	1'-3'		x				x	
Shelter	Common juniper	<i>Juiperus communis</i>	x	x			x	x	3'-5'	x						x

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Invasive Shrubs Remove or avoid planting these species:

Kathy Smith, OSU*



Autumn Olive
Elaeagnus umbellata

Rob Routledge, Sault C.*



Common/Glossy Buckthorn
Rhamnus cathartica/*Frangula alnus*

Wendy Klooster, OSU*



Japanese Barberry
Berberis thunbergii

Chris Evans, U. of Ill.*



Non-native Honeysuckle
Select *Lonicera* species

*bugwood.org

Wildflowers

Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Light			Moisture			Size	Use by Birds					
			Full	Part	Shade	Dry	Med	Wet		C	F	H	L	N	S
Hummingbirds	Wild bergamot	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	x			x	x		2'-4'			x	x		
	Penstemon	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	x	x			x	x	3'-4'			x	x		
	Woodland phlox	<i>Phlox divaricata</i>		x	x		x		1'			x	x		
Larval host plants	Butterfly-weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	x			x	x		1'-3'			x	x	x	
	White snakeroot	<i>Eupatorium rugosum</i>		x	x		x		2'-4'				x		
	Woodland sunflower	<i>Helianthus divaricatus</i>	x	x		x	x		3'-5'				x		x
	Bluestem goldenrod	<i>Solidago caesia</i>	x	x	x	x	x		2'-3'				x		x
	Showy goldenrod	<i>Solidago speciosa</i>	x			x	x		2'-5'				x		x
Seed	Smooth aster	<i>Aster laevis</i>	x			x	x		2'-4'				x		x
	Lanceleaf coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>	x			x	x		1'-2'						x
	Purple coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	x			x	x		3'-4'						x
	Black-eyed susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	x	x		x	x		1'-3'				x		
	Prairie-dock	<i>Silphium terebinthinaceum</i>	x			x	x	x	4'-10'	x					

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Invasive Wildflowers

Remove or avoid planting these species:

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Garlic Mustard
Alliaria petiolata

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Dame's Rocket
Hesperis matronalis

Ohio State Weed Lab, OSU*



Japanese Knotweed
Polygonum cuspidatum

Rob Routledge, Sault C.*



Spotted Knapweed
Centaurea stoebe

*bugwood.org

Grasses & Sedges

Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Light			Moisture			Size	Use by Birds					
			Full	Part	Shade	Dry	Med	Wet		C	F	H	L	N	S
Short	Gray's sedge	<i>Carex grayi</i>		x	x		x	x	1'-2'	x			x		x
	Prairie dropseed	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	x				x		1'-3'	x					x
	Side oats grama	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	x			x			2'-3'	x					x
	Bicknell's sedge	<i>Carex bicknellii</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-3'	x			x		x
	Plantain sedge	<i>Carex plantaginea</i>		x	x		x		>1'	x			x		x
Medium	Little bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	x			x	x		2'-4'	x					x
	Virginia wild rye	<i>Elymus virginicus</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-4'	x					x
	Broomsedge	<i>Andropogon virginicus</i>	x			x	x		3'-4'	x				x	x
	Bluejoint grass	<i>Calamagrostis canadensis</i>	x	x			x	x	3'-4'	x					x
Tall	Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	x	x		x	x	x	3'-5'	x					x
	Indian grass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	x				x		4'-6'	x					x
	Prairie cordgrass	<i>Spartina pectinata</i>	x				x	x	4'-6'	x					x
	Big bluestem	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	x			x	x	x	5'-7'	x			x	x	x

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Invasive Grasses

Remove or avoid planting these species:

John M. Randall, TNC*



Smooth Brome
Bromus inermis

Nisa Karimi, WIDNR*



Lyme-grass
Leymus arenarius

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Reed Canarygrass
Phalaris arundinacea

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Eurasian Phragmites
Phragmites australis australis

*bugwood.org

Ground Cover & Vines

Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Light			Moisture			Size	Use by Birds					
			Full	Part	Shade	Dry	Med	Wet		C	F	H	L	N	S
Ground cover	Bearberry	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	x	x		x	x		<1'		x				
	Pennsylvania sedge	<i>Carex pensylvanica</i>		x		x	x		<1'				x		
	Creeping strawberry bush	<i>Euonymus obovatus</i>		x	x		x		<1'		x				
	Wild strawberry	<i>Fragaria spp.</i>	x	x	x		x		<1'		x				
	Creeping juniper	<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>	x			x			1'-2'		x				
	Canada mayflower	<i>Maianthemum canadense</i>			x	x	x		<1'		x				
	Partridge berry	<i>Mitchella repens</i>			x		x		<1'		x				
	Violets	<i>Viola spp.</i>		x	x	x	x		<1'				x		
	Vine	American bittersweet	<i>Celastrus scandens</i>	x	x			x	x			x			
Virginia creeper		<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x			x				
Greenbriar		<i>Smilax hispida</i>	x	x	x		x	x			x			x	
Poison ivy		<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x			x				
Riverbank grape		<i>Vitis riparia</i>	x	x			x	x			x			x	

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Invasive Ground Cover & Vines

Remove or avoid planting these species:

*bugwood.org

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Oriental Bittersweet
Celastrus orbiculatus

James H. Miller, USFS*



English Ivy
Hedra helix

Chris Evans, U of Ill.*



Periwinkle & Myrtle
Vinca major/minor

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Black & Pale Swallow-wort
Vincetoxicum nigrum/rossicum

Raingarden & Pond Edge

Category	Common Name	Scientific Name	Light			Moisture			Size	Use by Birds					
			Full	Part	Shade	Dry	Med	Wet		C	F	H	L	N	S
Hummingbirds	Swamp milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	x	x			x	x	3'-4'			x	x	x	
	Jewelweed	<i>Impatiens capensis</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-5'			x			
	Marsh blazing star	<i>Liatris spicata</i>	x				x	x	3'-4'			x			x
	Cardinal flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-4'			x			
	Blue vervain	<i>Verbena hastata</i>	x	x			x	x	3'-5'			x	x		x
Larval host plants	New England aster	<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	x				x	x	3'-6'				x		x
	Tussock sedge	<i>Carex stricta</i>	x					x	2'-4'	x			x	x	x
	Joe-pye weed	<i>Eupatorium maculatum</i>	x	x			x	x	4'-5'				x		x
	Boneset	<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	x	x			x	x	3'-5'				x		x
	Southern blue flag	<i>Iris virginica</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-3'				x		
	Riddell's goldenrod	<i>Solidago riddellii</i>	x				x	x	2'-4'				x		x
Seed	Fox sedge	<i>Carex vulpinoidea</i>	x	x			x	x	2'-3'	x			x		x
	Dark green bulrush	<i>Scirpus atrovirens</i>	x					x	3'-5'					x	x

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Invasive Wetland Species

Remove or avoid planting these species:

*bugwood.org

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Flowering Rush
Butomus umbellatus

Rob Routledge, Sault C.*



European Swamp Thistle
Cirsium palustre

Leslie Mehrhoff, U of Conn*



Purple Loosestrife
Lythrum salicaria

Rob Routledge, Sault C.*



Narrow-leaved Cat-tail
Typha angustifolia

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use native plants in formal landscaping?

Yes! Native plants come in all shapes, sizes and colors and there are many native alternatives to ornamentals. Michigan has many native rose bushes, stunning lillies, bold cardinal flowers, and beautiful flowering shrubs. Several professional landscape companies in Michigan specialize in native plants.

Should I plant wildflower seeds or plugs?

Wildflower seed mixes are a great choice when you're aiming for a more natural, "wild" planting and for large areas, seeds are the more affordable option. Seed plantings do generally need more care for controlling undesirable or invasive species.

How can I protect my native plants from herbivores?

Many native plants are tasty treats to deer, rabbits, and other herbivores. Many natural spray-on or granular deterrents including Liquid Fence and Plantskydd are available at garden centers or conservation districts. Trees and shrubs can be protected with clear corrugated "tree tubes."

My native trees and shrubs are being destroyed by insects—how can I protect them?

Native plants are well-accustomed to being eaten by insects, so they can easily bounce back next season. Remember, those insects are bird food—Doug Tallamy observed that a pair of Carolina chickadees need 5,000-9,000 caterpillars to raise just one brood.

My neighbors or HOA think my native plants look "wild" and disapprove—what should I do?

Clustering several plants of the same species together to look more landscaped can help. Utilizing well-defined borders like rocks, a low-growing clump grass, or wooden fences around your plantings can clean up edges. Mulch can add a manicured look. Consider attending neighborhood or HOA meetings to help answer questions and respectfully spread the word that natives and healthy yards are great for birds, butterflies, the environment and people, too.

I see birds using invasive or ornamental plants all the time—why are they bad?

Many birds use invasive or ornamental plants simply because they are often the only choice on the landscape. Native plants support 35 times more caterpillar biomass than invasive and ornamental plants do. Since caterpillars are the main food source for the majority of baby songbirds, if we do not replace invasives and ornamentals with natives, we can expect bird populations to continue to decline.

When should I clean up my yard in the fall?

The best answer is: wait until spring! Many flower seed heads attract finches and sparrows in winter. Standing grasses can provide cover from winter winds. Many insects overwinter in leaves, so by leaving them on your lawn you're providing food for many birds, plus leaves make a great natural fertilizer.

Helpful Resources

Michigan native plant growers:

Designs by Nature, Laingsburg, MI
Michigan Wildflower Farm, Portland, MI
Native Connections, Three Rivers, MI
Native Plant Nursery, Ann Arbor, MI
Wildtype Native Nursery, Mason, MI

Local groups:

The Stewardship Network (Great Lakes): A non-profit network to connect, equip and mobilize people and organizations to care for the land and water in their communities.

Wild Ones: A national non-profit with local chapters that teaches about the many benefits of growing native wildflowers in people's yards.

Books:

Bringing Nature Home by Douglas W. Tallamy
A Field Identification Guide to Invasive Plants in Michigan's Natural Communities by Michigan Natural Features Inventory
Landscaping with Native Plants of Michigan by Lynn M. Steiner
Stokes Bird Gardening Book: The Complete Guide to Creating a Bird-Friendly Habitat in Your Backyard by Donald and Lillian Stokes

Online Resources:

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. University of Texas at Austin. www.wildflower.org/plants
Michigan Flora. University of Michigan Herbarium. www.michiganflora.net

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