

Guide to Native Plant Landscaping

Bird-friendly landscaping provides food, saves water, and fights climate change



Where Birds Thrive, People Prosper

Birds connect us to the natural world and make our communities more beautiful and healthful places to live. Communities ranging from urban centers to rural towns can provide important habitat for birds.

Growing bird-friendly plants will attract and protect the birds you love while making your space beautiful, easy to care for, and better for the environment.

Native plants, or those that are uniquely adapted to your local environment, provide many more benefits to your neighborhood birds than non-native plants, and can help birds survive against threats like habitat loss and climate change. This is because native plants host far more caterpillars and insects than plants that are not from your local environment. They can also provide many benefits for birds year-round such as shelter, places to nest, and food resources such as seeds, berries, and nectar.

When you grow native plants, you are making an investment in a better tomorrow for birds and people too.

The Impact of Native Plants

557

Number of butterflies and moths native oak trees support. Non-native ginkgo trees host just five.

Water-wise, drought-tolerant native plants reduce water use, especially critical in drought-stricken, arid parts of our country.

1,200

U.S. crops that depend on pollinators to grow. Native plants are essential for pollinators like birds, bees, butterflies, and bats.

96

Percentage of land birds that feed insects to chicks.

Your native gardens adds to a collective effort to give back to birds and plant hope for their future.

80million

Estimated number of gallons of gas Americans burn in lawn mowers annually. This produces significant amounts of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases that drive climate change.

MORE INFORMATION

Audubon's Plants for Birds program: audubon.org/plantsforbirds

Creating a Native Plant Garden

1. DECIDE ON A GOAL

Most home landscapes can be converted by installing native plugs, which generally cost around \$3 - \$6 per plant. We recommend this route for the home landscape. Although buying plant plugs is often more expensive than spreading seed, you can more easily control where plants grow with plugs.

If your goal is to achieve a more "wild" look, you might consider using seed instead of plugs. Avoid buying generic "pollinator friendly" seed mixes, and be sure to consult with your local native plant nursery to select species that will not be aggressive.

2. SITE PREPARATION

If your site currently has turf grass, you will need to remove this by solarizing, cutting sod, or spraying with non-residual herbicide following recommended guidelines on the bottle. You can easily use these strategies in the spring and summer, and install your native plants in the fall or following spring. Consider enriching your soil with organic compost. Avoid tilling.

Use deep edging- putting some sort of barrier (steel or plastic edging) that goes into the ground to separate the native plant area from the lawn- to keep the lawn grass out. Use mulch to retain moisture, reduce weeding, and protect from winter freezing and drought if needed. Leaves make for good mulch.

Selection of a specific approach to site preparation depends on the existing site conditions and size of your project. It is wise to consult with your local landscape expert.

3. PLANTING YOUR GARDEN

The best times of the year to install plants are in the spring and fall. Check out our one-page guide on selecting native plants for more information on choosing the right plants and designing your space. Give your plants a good drink after installing them, and water deeply a few times a week as needed for the first 2 months if planted during the growing season, or until the first freeze if planted in the fall.

After the first year or two, native plants will require little watering, as they are adapted to local environmental conditions.

For more information, visit our **Guide to Growing Bird-Friendly Landscapes in Nebraska**:
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3a806a0290cd401c9577bfa81661ff2d>

USE THESE STEPS TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN A BIRD-FRIENDLY HABITAT THAT ATTRACTS COLORFUL BIRDS AND SWEET MELODIES. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A YARD, YOU CAN GROW NATIVE PLANTS IN CONTAINERS ON A PATIO OR BALCONY.



Photo: Amanda Hegg/Audubon

Books and Guides

Bringing Nature Home: How to Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants by Douglas Tallamy

Prairie Up: An Introduction to Natural Garden Design by Benjamin Vogt

The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden by Douglas Tallamy and Rick Darke





Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard by Douglas Tallamy





































































A New Garden Ethic: Cultivating Defiant Compassion for an Uncertain Future by Benjamin Vogt

Attracting Birds, Butterflies, and Other Backyard Wildlife by David Mizejewski

Welcome to Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife by John M. Marzluff and Jack Delap

Home-Friendly Nebraska Native Plants

Host Plant 
Loved by Birds 
Hummingbird Favorite 
Pollinator Favorite 

Plant Species	Plant Type	Sunlight Requirement	Soil Moisture	Bloom Period	Height	Spread	Wildlife Benefit	Bloom Color
Anise Hyssop (<i>Agastache foeniculum</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Med-Dry	Jun-Sep	3'	12-16"	  	Purple
Columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full Sun-Shade	Med-Dry	Apr-Jun	2'	10-17"	  	Red
Butterfly Milkweed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Jun-Aug	2'	1-3'	  	Orange
White Wild Indigo (<i>Baptisia alba</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Dry	Jun-Jul	4'	2.5-3.5'	  	Cream
Side-oats Grama (<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>)	Warm Season Grass	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Aug-Sep	3'	24"	 	Green/Tan
Purple Prairie Clover (<i>Dalea purpurea</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Jul-Sep	2'	18-24"	 	Purple
Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Med Dry	Jul-Sep	4'	18-24"	 	Pink
Joe Pye Weed (<i>Eutrochium maculatum</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Wet-Med Wet	Jul-Sep	5'	3-4'	 	Pink
Wild Geranium (<i>Geranium maculatum</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full Sun-Shade	Med-Med Dry	Apr-Jul	12"	10-12"	 	Lt Purple
Junegrass (<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>)	Cool Season Grass	Full Sun	Med Dry-Dry	Jun-Jul	2'	10-12"		Green/Tan
Button Blazing Star (<i>Liatris aspera</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Jul-Oct	3'	10-18"	 	Purple
Cardinal Flower (<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>)	Short-Lived Perennial	Full-Partial Sun	Wet-Med Wet	Jul-Sep	4'	6-16"	 	Red
Foxglove Beardtongue (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Med Dry	Jun-Jul	4'	12-18"	 	White
Sweet Black-Eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia submentosa</i>)*	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Med Dry	Aug-Oct	5'	2-3'	 	Yellow
Little Bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	Warm Season Grass	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Jul-Oct	3'	2-3'	 	Green/Tan
Prairie Dropseed (<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>)	Warm Season Grass	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Dry	Aug-Oct	2'	2-3'	 	Green/Tan
Showy Goldenrod (<i>Solidago speciosa</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Sep-Nov	5'	2-3'	 	Yellow
Mountain Mint (<i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Wet-Med Dry	Jun-Sep	3'	12-18"	 	White
Bradbury's Monarda (<i>Monarda bradburiana</i>)*	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Med Dry	Jun-Jul	2'	12-18"	  	Lt Purple
Aromatic Aster (<i>Symphotrichum oblongifolium</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full Sun	Med Dry-Dry	Aug-Nov	2'	12-18"	 	Purple
Purple Poppy Mallow (<i>Callirhoe involucrata</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full Sun	Med-Dry-Dry	Jun-Aug	6"	18-24"	 	Pink
Blue Grama (<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>)	Warm Season Grass	Full Sun	Med Dry-Dry	Jul-Sep	1'	12-14"	 	Green/Blue
Early Sunflower (<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Med Dry	Jun-Sep	5'	18-36"	 	Yellow
Lance-leaf Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full Sun	Med Dry-Dry	May-Aug	2'	10-16"	 	Yellow
Long-headed Coneflower (<i>Ratibida columnifera</i>)	Perennial Forb	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Jun-Aug	3'	1-2'	 	Yellow, Red
Showy Milkweed (<i>Asclepias speciosa</i>)**	Perennial Forb	Full Sun	Med-Dry	Jun-Aug	4'	2-3'	 	Pink
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)**	Large Shrub	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Med Dry	Jun-Aug	10'	3-5'	 	White
American Plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>)**	Large Shrub	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Med Dry	Apr-May	20'	5-15'	 	White
Hackberry (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>)	Large Tree	Full-Partial Sun	Med Wet-Med	Apr-May	50'	40-50'	 	Green
Eastern Redbud (<i>Cercis canadensis</i>)	Medium Tree	Part Shade-Shade	Med Wet	Mar-Apr	20-30'	20-35'	 	Pink
Downy Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	Medium Tree	Full Sun-Shade	Med-Dry	Apr-May	25'	6'	 	White
Bur Oak (<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>)	Large Tree	Full-Partial Sun	Med-Dry	Apr-Jun	80'	20-30'	 	Green/Tan

*Plants that are native to neighboring states but are beneficial to wildlife and work great in a garden setting

**Plants that may be aggressive in a home setting without pruning

List represents a limited selection of plants. More plant species can be found at your local native plant nursery.

Selecting Native Plants

Choosing a variety of plants ranging from ground cover to short, medium, and tall perennials, and all the way to trees and shrubs helps to attract a variety of species while providing a diverse array of structural and food resources they depend on.

Check out our native plant list and lists from Nebraska native plant nurseries for some of the best bird- and wildlife-friendly plants in Nebraska and to learn more about favored growing conditions for each plant species.

Narrow down your selection to native plants that are appropriate for your **aesthetic vision**, the **soil type** and **sunlight conditions** of your desired location.

You may also consider selecting plants based on **bloom period, flower and leaf color, texture, & height/spread**. Consult with your local native plant nursery about growth habits of plants on your list. Choose a variety of plants with staggered bloom periods throughout the growing season. This will help to attract birds and butterflies to your garden for longer periods.

NEBRASKA NATIVE PLANT NURSERIES

[Midwest Natives Nursery](#) (native plugs; Lincoln, NE)

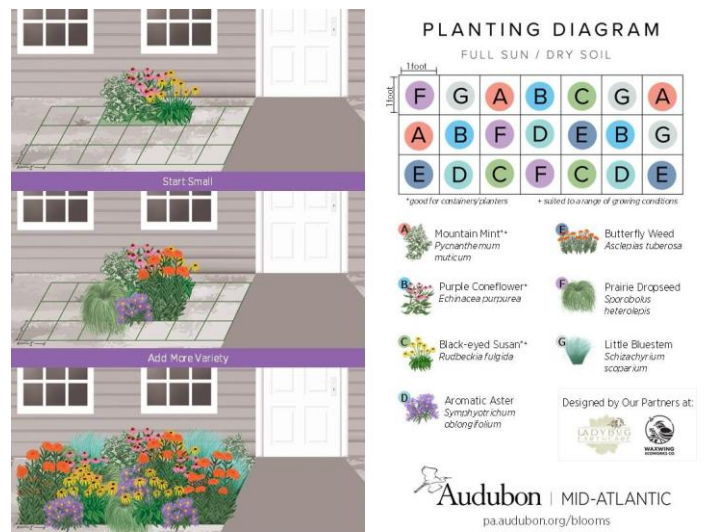
[Prairie Legacy, Inc.](#) (native plugs, seeds, trees, & shrubs; Western, NE)

[Prairie Plains Resource Institute](#) (native plugs and seed; Marquette, NE)

[Great Plains Nursery](#) (native trees and shrubs; Weston, NE)

[Nebraska Statewide Arboretum](#) (plant sales with native plugs, project funding; Lincoln, NE)

[Monarch Gardens LLC](#) (native plugs, online garden guides, consultation, & classes; Lincoln, NE)



Example of planting diagram | Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Calculate the square footage of your garden space to get a rough idea of how many plants you will need based on the spacing information for each species. It may help to draw out your landscape design with colored circles in the locations where you would like each plant to be placed, and help you envision how much space it will take up.

Try to plan for taller plants in the back or middle of your garden bed to avoid blocking other plants from view or creating a public safety issue along sidewalks and other lanes of travel.

Also consider grouping 3 or more of one plant species in the same area. This creates an attractive, intentional, and tidy look and is also favored by birds and pollinators.