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NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Your yard — and the kinds of plants in it — matters to birds! As natural areas for birds continue to decrease, so do native plants and the important food sources they provide for birds.

What are native plants?

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. North Carolina is home to thousands of native plant species. Many are stunningly beautiful; some occur nowhere else in the world. Over many millennia, our native wildlife — including birds — have adapted to the resources provided by the native flora. Native plants are, in a real sense, "home" for our birds.

Why are native plants important for birds?

In a word: insects. Virtually all land birds — 96% — require insect food for their young. Native plants support healthy populations of insects, including caterpillars, that breeding birds feed their nestlings. However, nonnative plants contain foreign compounds that most native insects won't eat. Without insects for food, baby birds starve. By adding native plants to your yard, you can help restore the imbalance created by non-native plantings and ensure the survival of future generations of birds.

Invasive plants – avoid these!

Some of the most common – or, in a few cases, "up-and-coming" – invasive species in the Piedmont of North Carolina are listed below.

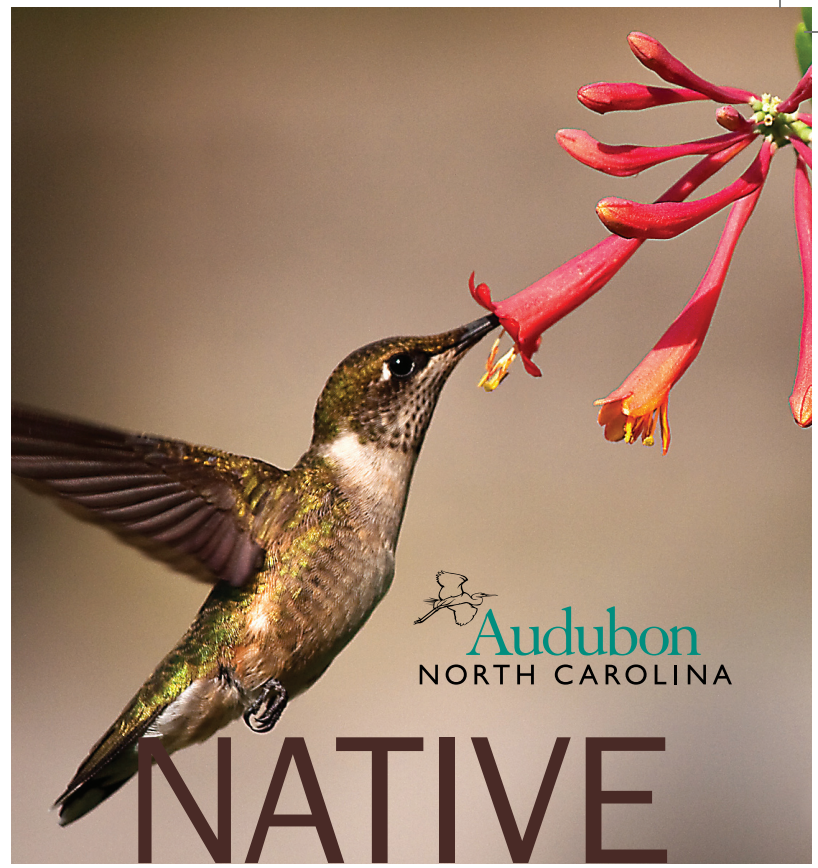
Common name	Scientific name
English ivy	*Hedera helix*
Privets	*Ligustrum* spp.
Autumn olive, thorny olive	*Elaeagnus umbellata, pungens*
Exotic Wisterias	*Wisteria sinensis, W. floribunda*
Japanese honeysuckle	*Lonicera japonica*
Mimosa, silktree	*Albizia julibrissin*
Periwinkle, Vinca	*Vinca* spp.
Japanese Spiraea	*Spiraea japonica*
Leatherleaf Mahonia	*Mahonia bealei*
Bradford pear	*Pyrus calleryana*
Pampas grass	*Cortaderia selloana*
Chinese silvergrass	*Miscanthus sinensis*
Japanese stiltgrass	*Microstegium vimineum*
Sacred bamboo	*Nandina domestica*
Tree-of-Heaven	*Ailanthus altissima*
Multiflora rose	*Rosa multiflora*
Sericea, bushclover	*Lespedeza cuneata*

Additional resources regarding invasive plants are available at www.ncwildflower.org/invasives/invasives.htm

Audubon NORTH CAROLINA

NORTH CAROLINA BOTANICAL GARDEN
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

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PIEDMONT

"It's simple: By gardening with native plants – no matter where you live or how small or large your space is – you can help sustain wildlife."

DOUG TALLAMY, BRINGING NATURE HOME

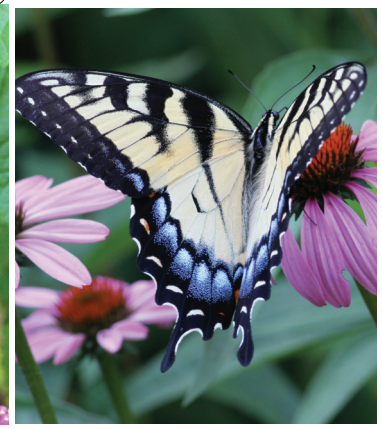
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Winterberry



Gray Catbird on Beautyberry



Tiger Swallowtail



Brown-headed Nuthatch



Cardinal Flower

Below are lists of native plants that provide a variety of foods for birds and that also grow well in gardens and yards.

Larval host plants

Plant these – and feed baby birds

Common name	Scientific name
Spicebush	*Lindera benzoin*
Native plums	*Prunus americana, angustifolia*
Oaks	*Quercus alba, Q. phellos, Q. shumardii*
Wild indigos	*Baptisia* spp., *Thermopsis villosa*
Native blueberries	*Vaccinium arboretum, V. stamineum*
Pawpaw, dwarf pawpaw	*Asimina triloba, A. parviflora*
River oats	*Chasmanthium latifolium*

Berry-producing plants

Nature's energy-packed treats

Common name	Scientific name
Flowering dogwood	*Cornus florida*
Winterberry holly	*Ilex verticillata*
American beautyberry	*Callicarpa americana*
Black cherry	*Prunus serotina*
Viburnums	*Viburnum nudum, V. dentatum, V. acerifolium*
Red chokeberry	*Photinia (Aronia) pyrifolia*
Black gum	*Nyssa sylvatica*

Seed/nut-producing plants

Nutrient-rich and long-lasting

Common name	Scientific name
Maples	*Acer rubrum, A. floridanum, A. leucoderme* (native)
Purple coneflower	*Echinacea purpurea*
Swamp sunflower	*Helianthus angustifolius*
Joe-Pye weed	*Eutrochium fistulosum*
Bluestem	*Andropogon* spp.
Black-eyed Susan	*Rudbeckia* spp.
Shortleaf pine, Virginia pine	*Pinus echinata, P. virginiana*

Nectar-producing plants

The sweetest things around

Common name	Scientific name
Wild bergamot, Bee balm	*Monarda didyma, M. fistulosa*
Cardinal flower	*Lobelia cardinalis*
Ironweed	*Vernonia noveboracensis*
Buttonbush	*Cephalanthus occidentalis*
Sweet pepperbush	*Clethra alnifolia*
Stokes aster	*Stokesia laevis*
Red buckeye	*Aesculus pavia*

Are nonnative plants bad for birds?

Though often pretty, nonnatives ultimately do not provide enough resources, particularly insects, to feed baby birds and sustain healthy bird populations.

"But birds love my Privet hedge!"

Adult birds are adaptable and will readily eat the fruits of nonnative plants. Most insects, however, are not as flexible and do not feed on nonnative plants. With fewer insects, baby birds starve – and bird populations plummet.

What are invasive plants?

Invasive plants, like kudzu and Chinese privet, are nonnative species that have escaped cultivation and now overrun native vegetation. This has dire consequences for birds: less food (especially for nestlings), fewer nesting sites, and increased predation.

Online resources for native plants

- NC Native Plant Society – www.ncwildflower.org
- NC Botanical Garden – www.ncbg.unc.edu
- NC Cooperative Extension – www.ncsu.edu/goingnative
- Audubon North Carolina – www.ncaudubon.org

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