

# Mecklenburg Audubon Soci-

## Backyard Habitat: It's the Berries

If you are a year round feeder like I am, you have probably noticed that starting around the middle of August through October (depending on weather) feeder activity slows down. A lot of people ask me during this time "Where have all the birds gone?" I usually tell them some have probably migrated out of the area but the others are still around dining on the local cuisine. In late of the winter makes them more appetizing to the birds. Thus they are at their most delectable when food is the scarcest.

After all variety is the spice of life. Most people when they think of feeding birds think of seed and suet. But many birds such as the Robin, Bluebird and Cedar Waxwing never eat seeds. Therefore, they never come to the feeders. If you want to provide food for these guys you have to do it naturally. And the best way is with berry producing trees and shrubs.

Listed below are some suggestions of what to plant. If it you have the space, time and money it is possible to have fruit for the birds summer, fall and win-



ter. But being able to provide fruit in the winter is probably the top priority then work backwards to fall and then summer. Did you know the berries of plants like chokeberry, roses, hollies, sumacs and Virginia creeper are actually bitter and unpalatable to the birds in the fall when they first ripen. But freezing and thawing over the course of the winter makes them more appetizing to the birds. Thus they are at their most delectable when food is the scarcest.

When selecting varieties look for the native species. Cultivators of the native species have usually been developed to have larger fruit. Birds, however, prefer to eat small berries – ones they can swallow whole. That means they need to measure less than 1/2" in diameter for the smaller birds like the bluebird and cedar waxwing.

Another reason to give native vegetation primary consideration when choosing berry plants is the local birds have evolved along with these plants. Consequently, native varieties are better adapted to providing local birds with the nutrition they need. Their berries are also readily identified as a food source.

There are a few plants to avoid. Some plants produce berries that birds find unpalatable and are seldom touched by birds even though they are very attractive to us. Manzanita is one I have in my yard (I didn't plant it) that have lots of berries but are never touched by birds. Also avoid *laurustinus viburnums* and linden.



Firethorns (*Pyracantha*) are often listed as favorites of robins, jays, thrashers, waxwings, catbirds, cardinals, mockingbirds and thrushes. On campus the birds fight over these bushes. So I decided to plant some in my yard. The landscaper suggested a particular subspecies because it didn't grow as big. The plant has done well but the birds haven't touched the fruit. Recently, I discovered the particular subspecies I purchased 'Mo-have' along with another one called 'Apache' have been developed to be exceptionally resistant to bird feeding! Guess what is probably going to get pulled out this winter?

So be careful when selecting berry producing trees and shrubs. Do your homework first. Then plant away and then let mother nature refill the feeders every year!





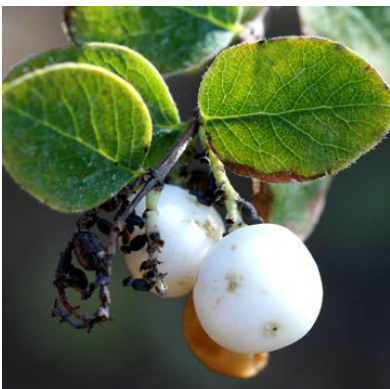
Serviceberry



Dogwood Berries



American Holly



Snowberry

## Summer

- Cherry** - Bluebird, cedar waxwing, finch, flicker, mockingbird, robin, rose-breasted grosbeak, towhee, vireos
- Blackberry** - Catbird, oriole, sparrows, thrush, towhee, vireos, woodpeckers
- Elderberry** - Bluebird, blue jay, brown thrasher, cardinal, catbird, mockingbird, robin, rose-breasted grosbeak and many others
- Serviceberry** (*Allegheny*) (*Amelanchier laevis*) - Bluebird, cardinal, catbird, flicker, mockingbird, oriole, scarlet tanager, thrush, woodpecker
- Blueberry, Highbush** (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) - Bluebird, blue jay, catbird, flycatchers, mockingbird, oriole, sparrow, tanager, thrushes, towhee, turkey, cedar waxwing, woodpeckers

## Fall

- Dogwood, Flowering** (*Cornus florida*) - Bluebird, brown thrasher, cardinal, catbird, cedar waxwing, kingbird, purple finch, robin, towhee, vireos, woodpeckers and many other species
- Bayberry** - Catbird, chipping sparrow, junco, song sparrow, thrushes
- Firethorn** (*Pyracantha*) - Bluebird, brown thrasher, catbird, mockingbird, purple finch, robin, sparrows
- Hackberry, Eastern** (*Celtis occidentalis*) - Bluebird, brown thrasher, cardinal, flicker, mockingbird, robin, and 29 other species
- Honeysuckle** [Native species] - Bluebird, brown thrasher, cedar waxwing, evening grosbeak, goldfinch, hummingbird, junco, mockingbird, robin, and many others.
- Mulberry** (*Sorbus* spp.) - Cardinal, cedar waxwing, cuckoo, indigo bunting, oriole, tanagers, thrushes, vireos, warblers

## Winter

- Cedar, Eastern Red** (*Juniperus virginiana*) - Bluebird, cardinal, flicker, mockingbird, purple finch, robin, sparrows, and many others.
- Rugosa Rose** (*Rosa rugosa*) - Bluebird, brown thrasher, cardinal, cedar waxwing, evening grosbeak, goldfinch, junco, mockingbird, robin, song sparrow
- American Holly** (*Ilex opaca*) - Bluebird, brown thrasher, catbird, cedar waxwing, flicker, mockingbird, robin, thrush, and 37 other species
- Snowberry** (*Symphoricarpos albus*) - Bobwhite, cedar waxing, grosbeaks, robin, thrushes, and 20 other species
- Hawthorn** (*Cartaegus* spp.) - Cardinal, cedar waxwing, flicker, hummingbird, mockingbird, yellow-bellied sapsucker and 27 other species
- Junipers** - Bluebird, cardinal, flicker, mockingbird, purple finch, robin, sparrows, wood thrush
- Virginia creeper** (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) - Catbird, chickadee, finches, flycatchers, mockingbird, scarlet tanager, tree swallow, vireos, warblers, white-breasted nuthatch, woodpeckers, and 25 other species
- Crab apple** (*Malus* spp.) - Cedar waxwing, hummingbird, mockingbird, robins, and 26 other species
- Viburnums** - Bluebird, finch, flicker, robin, thrushes, cedar waxwing, woodpecker

Information gathered from: *The Naturalist's Garden* by Ruth Shaw Ernst (Globe Pequot, 1993) and "Berries for Birds" by Kathy Piper Bird Watcher's Digest Vol. 20 No. 4 March/April 1998.