

life

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Bright, fruity and bird-friendly

This is the third in a series of columns on welcoming birds and butterflies.

In addition to native trees and shrubs, there are also a number of native wildflowers and vines that you should consider planting in your yard. Not only will they enhance the value of your property as wildlife habitat, but they also confer a "sense of place" since the majority can be found growing wild in the Kawarthas.



Drew Monkman

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

I have, however, also suggested a few non-native annuals and perennials, if only because they are easily available, provide lots of colour, and are proven to attract many species of birds and butterflies.

Native wildflowers

Although the following species do not all necessarily attract birds, they do serve as an attractive, logical complement to the native trees and shrubs. **In shady sites with well-drained, good quality soil**, native wildflowers that should do well include wild ginger, white trillium, bloodroot, wild columbine, red baneberry, mayapple, Solomon's seal, hepatica, and trout lily. You might also wish to add some of our native ferns like Christmas fern, maidenhair fern, and ostrich fern. I have had great luck with all of these species.

In shady, acidic woodland sites where conifers abound, some plants to consider are Canada mayflower, wintergreen, bluebead lily, bunchberry, partridgeberry, and barren strawberry. **In sunny, acidic sites**, bearberry often does well, too.

Sunny, dry parts of your property can support a large variety of native tallgrass prairie wildflowers such as butterfly weed, wild lupine, wood lily, Canada tick trefoil, wild bergamot, Canada goldenrod, New England aster, sky blue aster, heath aster, cylindrical blazing star, mountain mint, and nodding onion. Some grasses that thrive in this sort of habitat are little bluestem, big bluestem, switchgrass, and Indian grass.

Sunny sites with relatively moist soil – or well-watered soil – can support species such as cardinal flower, great lobelia, swamp milkweed, Culver's root, bottle gentian, Joe Pye weed,

and false dragonhead.

Native vines

Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*): In late summer, this tree-climbing vine clothes itself in brilliant scarlet foliage which lasts into mid-fall. Its attractive fruit is an important food source for many bird species such as thrushes and catbirds. Virginia creeper also provides birds with nesting sites and cover.

Wild grape (*Vitis* spp.): Wild grape is a great nesting vine for many different kinds of birds. Many species will also feed on the dark blue grapes, especially in late fall and winter. Wild grape does best in open, sunny places. It will grow very large, however, and might require a supporting, sturdy arbor.

American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*): American bittersweet is a twining, climbing vine that is often found sprawling on fences in sunny locations. Its fruit hangs in clusters and eventually splits open to reveal showy, bright-red fleshy seeds. It's another good cover for birds as well as a source of food in winter. Be careful not to inadvertently buy Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) which is extremely invasive and can eventually strangle trees by wrapping itself around them.

Annuals for birds

Several non-native annuals can also be very effective in attracting birds, especially in the late summer and fall when the seeds ripen. When the garden season ends, simply leave the plants standing right into winter. The one essential ingredient for annuals is lots of sun. It's also important to plant them densely since birds feel more secure in thick growth.

Common Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*): Sunflowers are a wonderful addition to any yard. They require little maintenance and will flourish in well-drained soil and full sunlight. The huge, towering yellow flower-heads are magnificent as a garden background. Hummingbirds are often the first to discover these flowers. Warblers, too, will often come in search of the numerous insects that the flowers attract. The seeds are devoured by species including goldfinches, cardinals, and rose-breasted grosbeaks.

Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia rotundifolia*): These four-foot to eight-foot tall plants produce brilliant orange-red, daisy-like flowers. Mass plantings are not only very attractive but most effective in attracting birds and butterflies. The flowers are vis-



KARL EGRESSY photo

A ruby-throated hummingbird visiting a cardinal flower. Lady-in-Red is another hummingbird magnet.

ited by hummingbirds and butterflies, while the seeds are a magnet to nearly all of the common feeder birds.

Cosmos (*Cosmos* spp.): Another annual that attracts birds is cosmos. It is a long-blooming annual that produces new flowers from mid-summer through early fall. Goldfinches, in particular, will come to feed on the seeds, sometimes right into early winter. Cosmos is practically maintenance free.

Zinnia (*Zinnia* spp.): Through fall and early winter, goldfinches, sparrows and chickadees will all flock to zinnia seeds. Look for a bushy, branching variety. The flowers can be bright or pastel, depending on the variety.

Love-lies-bleeding (*Amaranthus caudatus*): These are bushy, three-foot to four-foot tall plants with bright magenta stems. The deep pink flowers appear on long, dangling "ropes." Love-lies-bleeding produces thousands of tiny seeds that are rich in oil and therefore highly prized by birds. The plants should be left in the garden right into winter to provide food for winter finches and sparrows.

Bachelor's-button (*Centaurea cyanus*): These are two-foot to three-foot tall branching plants with fringed flowers in a variety of different colours. You can actually sow seeds every four weeks or so for a longer season of blooms. This plant, too, attracts sparrows and finches.

Attracting hummingbirds

Salvia (*Salvia* spp.): *Salvia*

Lady-in-Red is probably the best plant for attracting hummingbirds. It has bright red, tubular flowers that are very rich in nectar. It should be planted early in the season in generous quantities.

Lobelia cardinalis: This native species is a long-proven hummingbird magnet, thanks to its flashy red flowers. Lobelia likes rich, moist soil and is tolerant of a variety of lighting conditions. It can usually be purchased as a potted perennial in garden centres.

Scarlet runner beans: This annual is a climber that requires a fence or trellis for support. Its bright orange blossoms appear continuously over the summer. An added bonus is that the beans are edible. Scarlet runner is easy to grow.

Penstemon: Some penstemons such as hairy beardtongue are native to the Kawarthas. Most, however, originate from the mountains and plateaus of the Rockies. The best variety for attracting hummingbirds is called Iron Maiden. Penstemons are often planted in rock gardens.

Cardinal climber (*Ipomoea sloteri*, *Ipomoea x multifida*): This morning glory relative is an annual vine with abundant bright red, tubular flowers. If you start it early enough, it can grow 10 feet or more. It needs to be provided with climbing support.

Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*):

Native from New York state south, bee-balm produces a ragged, scarlet pompon of tubular flowers that are very attractive to ruby-throated hummingbirds. It's a spreading perennial, however, that requires lots of space. Fortunately, bee-balm is easy to control by simply pulling up sections of the rug-like mat of roots. The best varieties for attracting hummingbirds are Cambridge Scarlet and Garden-view Scarlet. Wild Bergamot (*M. fistulosa*) is a native bee-balm of the Kawarthas which sometimes also brings in hummingbirds.

Attracting butterflies

Some of our most beautiful butterfly species such as the monarch are also experiencing a loss of habitat. Backyard sanctuaries are one way we can all help to provide these species with both nectar and plants on which to lay their eggs. The following species are particularly good for attracting monarchs.

Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*): Belonging to the genus *Asclepias*, milkweeds are native, sun-loving perennials. They are excellent nectar plants and will attract many different species of butterflies. Butterfly weed blooms in July and August. It is drought-tolerant prairie plant with attractive clusters of orange flowers.

Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) Blooming mostly in July, common milkweed, too, is

drought-tolerant. It has dull purple flower clusters and a nice fragrance

Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) Two subspecies of this milkweed are available, 'incarnata,' which grows 4 to 5 feet tall, and 'puchra,' which is only 2 to 3 feet. It blooms in July and early August and prefers dampish areas. The flowers are bright pink to red.

Butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) This non-native shrub blooms from July through to frost. There are blue, purple and white varieties. It is attractive to hummingbirds as well as many insect species.

Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*): Blooming in July and August, purple coneflower has large purple flowers with bronze, dome-shaped centers. The seeds are also attractive to finches and sparrows. It is native to the mid-western U.S.

Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia rotundifolia*): This annual blooms from summer through fall and produces stunning orange-scarlet flowers.

Verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*): There are both perennial and annual varieties of verbena available. It blooms from summer through to fall and produces clusters of tiny lilac-purple flowers that are very fragrant.

Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*) This native perennial blooms throughout the summer. It has small pink flowers in large dome shaped clusters. It prefers moist soil.

Other good choices in perennials for attracting butterflies include asters (*Aster*), goldenrods (*Solidago*), pincushion flower (*Scabiosa caucasica*), showy stonecrop (*Sedum spectabile*), Hollyhock (*Althaea rosea*), and Lantana (*Lantana camara*). As for annuals, you might wish to include zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*), French marigold (*Tagetes patula*) and cosmos (*Cosmos sulphureus*). Late-blooming varieties of lilac such as dwarf Korean lilac (*Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin') are an excellent choice for providing spring nectar.

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