

Bring Native Songbirds to your Ohio Yard

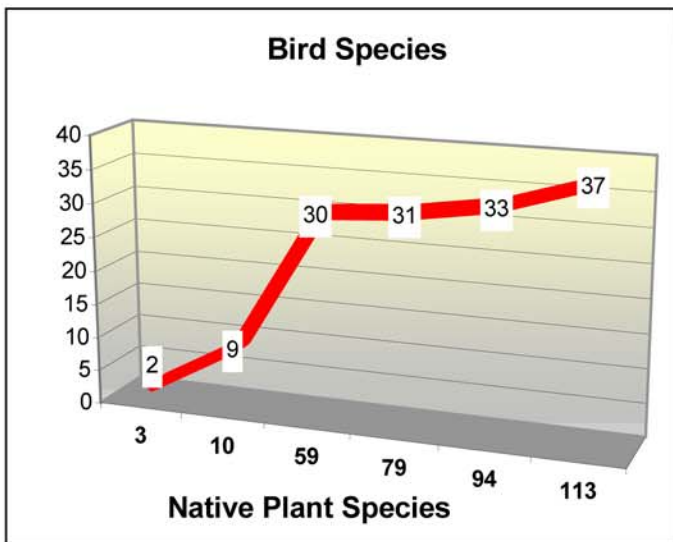


Backyard ©2006 by Marc Apfelstadt

In 1973, two Forest Researchers determined that you could effectively scale down a wildlife habitat. National Wildlife Federation began their wildlife habitat education program, which reached me and my husband 30 years later (better late than never!).

We have a postage-stamp sized yard in a typical subdivision. By adding bird feeders and birdbaths, we only attracted 9 bird species. In 2003, we created a native forest edge in our backyard and eliminated chemicals.

The count jumped from 9 to 30 species in 12 different bird groups as listed in *Birds of Ohio* by McCormac/Kennedy. A Cooper's hawk showed up almost immediately. A migrating Ovenbird re-fueled here the next October on its way from arctic Canada to South America.



Create a Native Forest Edge

Go native: Native birds evolved to depend on native plants. They are easy to care for once established because they have adapted to our region (R. G. Bailey, www.fs.fed.us/land/ecosysmgmt/ecoreg1_home.html). Traditional chemically treated lawns have little value to most native birds.

Only about 25% of bird species will use a bird feeder. We use baffle-protected feeders at different heights to bring birds out about 10-15 feet from cover where we can see them, and they are safe from hidden predators. We leave lots of leaf litter under our trees so there are bugs for natural food.

To create a forest edge: We thought in vertical layers. Native plants at different heights with fruits and seeds ripening at different times will bring the most species of birds (more about berries: read Tucker audubon.org/states/oh/oh/news/documents/10-05final.pdf).

In the rear, plant canopy trees (i.e. Hackberry *Celtis occidentalis*) and sub-canopy trees (i.e. Common Chokecherry *Prunus virginiana*). Below, plant small, shade-tolerant trees (i.e. Nannyberry *Viburnum Viburnum lentago*, Grey Dogwood *Cornus racemosa*) and bushes (i.e. Spicebush, *Lindera benzoin*).

Then plant groundcover and vines that provide fruit (i.e. Virginia Creeper *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). In the front of your forest edge, plant woodland plants (i.e. Woodland sunflower, *Helianthus strumosus*), native ferns (i.e. Cinnamon fern, *Osmunda cinnamomea*) and native herbs (i.e. Purple Coneflower *Echinacea purpurea*).

In sun: Plant evergreens like Juniper (*Juniperus communis* for small yards), native flowers (i.e. Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia fulgida*) and grasses (i.e. Big Bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii*) and leave them standing until Mother's Day. We watch birds eat plant seeds through early spring.

Get Certified: Provide food, water, cover, places to raise young, move toward adding chemical-free native plants, and National Wildlife Federation will certify your yard as an official Wildlife Habitat. Displaying their sign helps others understand what we are doing. See www.nwf.org/backyard.