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# NATURAL REWARDS IN NORTHEAST OHIO

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Many of us along Lake Erie are fortunate enough to be on the migratory route of many bird species. Generally speaking, birds stop for a rest along our lakeshore communities before heading north in spring & after they have crossed the lake in the fall, on their way south. In addition to the variety of migratory birds, we have year-round neighborhood birds frequenting many gardens. You may see Sparrows, Cardinals, Blue Jays, Chickadees, Nuthatches, Mourning Doves, etc.

There are several things you can do to attract birds to your yard. Birds need shelter, food & water for survival. Consider native evergreen trees and shrubs for year-round protection. Native evergreens provide both shelter and food for our feathered friends. There are also deciduous trees, shrubs and perennials which are great food sources for wildlife.

<http://ohiodnr.gov/gonative> is a great resource for native plants in our area.

Water is another piece to this puzzle and is required for bathing and drinking.

Homemade birdbaths may be a fun project for children and adults, alike. Or, they may be purchased at local garden centers.

Fountains and ponds are great substitutes for birdbaths and will provide a tranquil garden setting for busy homeowners.

My challenge to fellow gardeners is to come together, with your neighbors and local government, to create a wildlife corridor, connecting parks from one end of your neighborhood to the other, by offering mixed native trees, shrubs and perennials. Maybe you love flowers and one of your neighbors prefers low maintenance evergreens and/or fruiting trees. You can plant native flowering shrubs and perennials, while your neighbor may offer shelter and food.

Not only are homeowners participating in conservation, but parks' departments & local municipalities' have changed the way schools and public office buildings are being landscaped.

Likewise, local government in your community can help tie the web together. I would like to encourage mayors to consider going native when landscaping plans are introduced for old and new projects. Talk to your elected officials about native,

beneficial plantings on school property and at municipal buildings. We can all plant for wildlife, while adding a beautiful design aesthetic to our communities. Doing so will not only feed the birds, bees and butterflies, but will feed the souls of its citizens.

*Please note: Bird feeders are outlawed by some municipalities. A responsibility that we have when using feeders and birdbaths is to make sure they are frequently cleaned. For example, hummingbird feeders are very popular, but they require cleaning & sugar water replacement every few days during hot summer months. Otherwise, mold will grow and sugar water can ferment. This will have dire consequences on those ethereal beings as well as other birds such as Baltimore Orioles which may visit the same feeders. Instead, incorporate native plants into your garden. Whether you have an established garden or need a garden renovation, you can incorporate bird (bees & butterfly) friendly plants into your space.*

When planting for wildlife please do not use chemicals. Birds, bees and butterflies are not able to differentiate between treated and untreated lawns and plants. There are reasons why chemical applications are flagged for homeowners who hire out this service. It is a warning for people and pets to avoid the area. So, what is it doing to the wildlife who, unknowingly, come to your lawn and garden to feast?

Consider going organic. Good Nature (not a paid product) is an excellent company which uses corn gluten in the prevention of weed seed germination. They also use nematodes to naturally rid the lawn of pests. Their products are available at garden centers and application services are available for homeowners who are not DIYers.

Most of us can appreciate having a tranquil, stress free zone on our property to recover from the hustle and bustle of a busy life. There are those that report birdwatching as peaceful and calming. Why not enjoy this activity in your very own wildlife sanctuary?

*The National Wildlife Federation ([www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)) offers certification for wildlife sanctuaries. Visit their website for details and requirements on the subject.*

Schools across the country have participated in this process. Not only does this allow our youth to take part in saving the environment at a young age, it also adds to the student's appreciation of creating something beautiful, while engaging in the positive effects to their health and wellbeing. *There was a study by Lake County Nursery that concluded that planting trees and beautifying our neighborhoods reduces crime.*

Every citizen can appreciate beauty. Let's work together to contribute to the beautification and environmental

protection in these easy and simple ways. We all benefit from small, positive actions of others.

Have you heard of The Japanese Maple Garden? Most of our plantings are exotic species. Our garden has been nationally recognized & completely redoing it is not an option. In an effort to create a work of art, the issue of wildlife had not been taken into consideration. However, as changes were made, on a monthly basis & over the course of ten years, we noticed more and more birds visiting our garden during all four seasons.

The issue of planting “natives” never entered our minds, until recently, when I had a client whose desire was to attract more birds, bees & butterflies to her garden in Beachwood, Ohio. Since then, I realized that I should educate myself on the issue, which is becoming popular, as the need to protect our environment is more of a priority than ever. During my studies, I have come to realize, unknowingly, that my husband and I have used native plants in The Japanese Maple Garden!

I have since added Clethra as a hedge along a neighbor’s fence. At the back of the property, there is a hedge of Serviceberry. And, bordering another neighbor’s driveway, I have planted Echinacea, Cleome, Viburnum, Elderberry and Ninebark.

Our garden doesn’t lend itself to having showy flowers, so native perennials are kept to a minimum. On a visit to The Japanese Maple Garden you will find varieties of St. John’s Wort, Hemlock, Pine, Hydrangea, Viburnum and Fern, some selected from native species (not absolutely “native” for the dedicated native gardeners). My point here is to provide food for thought – and wildlife! Consider natives for future garden bed expansions and/or complete overhauls of flower beds.

I, personally, am addicted to exotic species! As a plant collector, I am always on the hunt for rare and unusual trees, shrubs and perennials. This may seem hypocritical to some; but if we can keep the “native” issue in mind when creating gardens, we can attract wildlife to a healthy, welcoming environment in our neighborhoods.

This brings me to the design aesthetic of your garden. One misconception is that going native means that your garden must look messy and unkempt. This is a myth. Some homeowners appreciate a natural, wild look and some don’t. Take your design style into consideration. Trees and shrubs are more costly than perennials, but are less work in the long run. Having a good mix of trees, shrubs and perennials can help you form a cohesive, neat look.

You may prefer to keep your current footprint. Simply add and/or replace perennials or shrubs (that aren’t doing well)

with native plants to suit your taste. Your local garden center can help you select native plants suitable for your gardening style, lighting requirements and water needs of the plants you select.

If you are uncertain of your gardening abilities, you may want to consider the help of a professional. A garden designer or garden coach can help you through the process of creating a wildlife sanctuary.

A garden designer will help with planning your garden and should provide a list of recommended plant material, with the option for the homeowner to complete the project themselves or hire a professional landscaper to complete the job.

A garden coach will work alongside the client, making recommendations and teaching the homeowner gardening tips and tricks throughout the gardening process. This approach is likely to be most cost effective if you are inclined to be involved in the creation of your garden.

Typically, a landscaper will tear out and replace garden beds, but not all landscapers have design experience. Some landscapers focus on lawn care only, renovating flower beds at their client's request. Often, they are not qualified in design or horticulture. However, there are design/build firms which may assist you through the entire process.

Not all landscape professionals are created equal. If you opt to hire a professional, be sure the individual or company has similar values and goals for the vision of your garden. Before going forward with any project, you may want to determine your budget. This will help you hire the appropriate professional for the job.

As we work with nature to bring beauty and peace into our lives, may we be mindful of the impact we have with the choices we make. We are but parts of the whole. If each one of us can make a positive impact, imagine what the world around us would look like. By choosing to protect and serve as stewards of our space, we can contribute to the survival of birds, beneficial insects and butterflies while benefiting from their beauty.

*We are but one thread  
within it. Whatever we  
do to the web, we do to  
ourselves. All things are  
bound together. All  
things connect.”*

Chief Seattle

## Resources:

### **Web**

<http://www.plantnative.org/rpl-inoh.htm>

<http://ohiodnr.gov/gonative>

[nativeplantsocietyneo.org](http://nativeplantsocietyneo.org)

[www.wildones.org](http://www.wildones.org)

[www.worldwildlife.org/threats/pollution](http://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/pollution)

### **Books**

Birdscaping in the Midwest by *Mariette Nowak*

Garden Secrets for Attracting Birds by *Rachael Lanicci*

Ohio Trees and Wildflowers by *James Kavanagh*

### **Films**

Dirt! The Movie

The Secret Life of Plants

## Birds in the Japanese Maple Garden:

- Mourning Dove
- Robin
- Sparrow
- Cardinal
- Baltimore Oriole
- Gray Catbird
- Cedar Waxwing
- Grackle
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Kinglet
- Wood Thrush
- Common Yellowthroat
- Warbler
- Eastern Towhee
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Grackle
- Nuthatch
- Titmouse
- House Finch
- Vireo
- Woodpecker varieties
- Wren
- Red-tailed hawk
- Falcon (unsure of which one)...

*I think I covered them all!*

### Tips from Garden PHD:

- Eliminate or minimize lawn area
- Don't be afraid to be creative
- Hire a garden coach to help with your confidence level if you're unsure of your skills
- Know your plants and bugs
- Eliminate or limit pesticides and herbicides. Carefully follow instructions
- Organics can be beneficial, but still impacts wildlife
- In some cases, disease-ridden plants may have to be removed. Remember right plant, right place is key
- Perennials and shrubs can be cut back to ground level and will sprout again. Do this first instead of reaching for chemicals
- Hand pull weeds & use corn gluten to prevent weed seed germination
- Keep grass at least three inches tall. Weeds will take over in lawns that are mowed too short
- Use nematodes for pesky lawn pests
- Burn weeds on hardscape areas or use vinegar. Be sure to spray weeds only, as other plants may be affected
- Use a variety of plants in your garden
- Use native plants throughout your landscape
- Provide a water source

*HAPPY  
PLANTING!*