



**BIRDS IN URBAN GARDENS**

By Leo Shapiro

Throughout history, birds have fascinated us. They are able to fly, as no human beings can do, and many of them are bright and colorful. Some birds are wonderful songsters, and their cheerful sounds add beauty and a note of victory to the air. They are an essential part of a garden's ecology. They control insect populations and help to spread plants by eating berries and releasing the indigested seeds in their droppings. In the following resource sheet, various aspects of attracting birds to urban gardens and encouraging them to nest are discussed. A bibliography is also included for those who want to study birds further.

Planting For Birds

Birds use shrubs and trees year-round for food and, in summer, for nesting. The following plantings are excellent for attracting birds to the urban garden:

Shrubs and Vines	Fruiting Period
American Elderberry, <i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	Late Summer – mid-fall
Amur Honeysuckle, <i>Lonicera maakii</i>	Fall
Arrowwood, <i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	Fall
Bayberry, <i>Myrica pennsylvanica</i>	Fall to early spring
Black Haw, <i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>	Fall
Highbush Blueberry, <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	Early summer - fall
Nannyberry, <i>Viburnum lentago</i>	Fall
Siberian Dodwood, <i>Cornus alba sibirica</i>	Fall
Tartatian Honeysuckle, <i>Lonicera tatarica</i>	Summer
Sargent Crabapple, <i>Malus sargentii</i>	Fall
Winterberry, <i>Ilex verticillata</i>	Fall-winter
Blackberry and Raspberry, <i>Rubus spp.</i>	Summer
Red Osier Dogwood, <i>Cornus stolonifera</i>	Midsummer - fall
Japanese Barberry, <i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	Fall-winter
Chokecherry, <i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	Fall-winter
Sumac, <i>Rhus spp.</i>	Early summer - winter
Serviceberry, <i>Amelanchier spp.</i>	Early summer - fall
Greenbrier, <i>Smilax spp.</i>	Fall - winter
Elderberry, <i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	Late summer - fall
Virginia Creeper, <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	Late summer - winter
Bittersweet, <i>Celastrus scandens</i>	Fall - winter
Wild Rose, <i>Rosa sp.</i>	Fall - winter
Coralberry, <i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i>	Fall- winter
Common Spicebush, <i>Lindera benzoin</i>	Mid summer - fall
Russian Olive, <i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>	Fall

# THE CITY LOT

Trees	Fruiting Period
Flowering Dogwood, <i>Cornus florida</i>	Fall - winter
Red Mulberry, <i>Morus rubra</i>	Late summer
Cherry Eleagnus, <i>Elaeagnus multiflora</i>	Summer
European Mountain Ash, <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Fall-winter
Hawthorn, <i>Crataegus spp.</i>	Spring - winter
Oak, <i>Quercus</i>	Fall
Wild Black Cherry, <i>Prunus serotina</i>	Mid summer - fall
Choke Cherry, <i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Mid summer - fall
Pin Cherry, <i>Prunus pennsylvanica</i>	Mid summer - fall
Eastern White Pine, <i>Pinus strobes</i>	Year round
Japanese Black Pine, <i>Pinus thunbergii</i>	Year round
Japanese White Pine, <i>Pinus parviflora</i>	Year round
Red Maple, <i>Acer negundo</i>	Fall
Silver Maple, <i>Acer saccharinum</i>	Early summer - fall
Sugar Maple, <i>Acer saccharum</i>	Early summer - fall
Box Elder, <i>Acer negundo</i>	Fall
American Beech, <i>Fagus grandifolia</i>	Fall
Birch, <i>Betula</i>	Year round
Spruce, <i>Picea</i>	Year round
Canadian Hemlock, <i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	Year round
Black Gum, <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	Late summer-fall
Mulberry, <i>Morus spp.</i>	Summer
Eastern Red Cedar, <i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	Fall - spring
Mountain Ash, <i>Sorbus spp.</i>	Late summer - spring

Flowers and Grasses	Fruiting Period
Sunflower, <i>Helianthus spp.</i>	Mid-summer - fall
Ragweed, <i>Ambrosia artemisiifolia</i>	Mid-summer - winter
Switch-Grass, <i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Mid-summer - fall
Timothy, <i>Phleum pratense</i>	Summer
Bristlegrass, <i>Setaria spp.</i>	Summer
Knotwood, <i>Polygonum spp.</i>	Late spring - fall
Pokeweed, <i>Phytolacca americana</i>	Fall

The following plants will protect birds from the weather, as well as from predators, and are therefore potential nesting sites:

Blackberry, <i>Rubus</i>	Beach Plum, <i>Prunus maritima</i>
Greenbriar, <i>Smilax</i>	Mock Orange, <i>Philadelphus virginialis</i>
Pine, <i>Pinus</i>	Flowering Dogwood, <i>Cornus florida</i>
Spruce, <i>Picea</i>	Cotoneaster, <i>Cotoneaster</i>
Fir, <i>Abies</i>	Willow, <i>Salix</i>
Viburnum, <i>Viburnum</i>	Honeysuckle, <i>Lonicera</i>
Canadian Hemlock, <i>Tsuga Canadensis</i>	Photinia, <i>Photinia villosa</i>
Native Roses, <i>Rosa</i>	Black Locust, <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>
Sassafras, <i>Sassafras albidum</i>	

Feeding

Planting with birds in mind is the best method of feeding them. However, you may want to hang feeders with seed. Black-oil sunflower seed is the preferred seed of many small feeder birds, white millet is the favorite food of most small-beaked ground-feeding birds. Make sure to clean the feeders at least twice a year and set them in squirrel, cat and rodent proof locations. For more information about bird feeders, their care and maintenance and bird seed visit the National Audubon Society web site at [http://www.audubon.org/bird/at\\_home/index.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html) . Wild birdseed can be purchased at supermarkets; quality birdseed and excellent feeders that will last for many years can be also obtained from National Audubon Society licensed outlets and suppliers <http://www.audubon.org/market/licensed/index.html>. Another source of bird supplies is the Hyde Bird Feeder Company, located at 33 Elm Street. Merrimack, NH 03054-6431, TEL: 603-423-0222, 888-247-3830, FAX: 603-423-0447, <http://www.hydebirdfeeder.com>. If you feed birds in the winter, it is **very important** to check feeders daily and keep them filled. Birds will concentrate around the feeders and become dependent on them for food. In times of severe weather, if the birds find their food source suddenly gone, they may not be able to find new supplies quickly enough and will starve or freeze. Do not stop feeding until spring has very definitely arrived. For insectivorous (insect-eating) birds such as the woodpecker, you can put out suet (beef fat) in a mesh bag (an onion bag, for example). You may wish to decorate your evergreens for the holiday season with strands of cranberries and popcorn – these will be eaten quickly by the birds.



Some Birds That Eat Suet	Some Birds That Eat Sunflower Seeds
Downy Woodpecker, <i>Picoides pubescens</i>	Cardinal, <i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
House Wren, <i>Troglodytos gedon</i>	White-Throated Sparrow, <i>Zanotruchia albicollis</i>
White-Breasted Nuthatch, <i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	Song Sparrow, <i>Melospiza melodia</i>
Starling, <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	White-Breasted Nuthatch*
Black-Capped Chickadee, <i>Parus atricapillus</i>	Black-Capped Chickadee*
Tufted Titmouse, <i>Parus bicolor</i>	Tufted Titmouse*
Blue Jay, <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	Blue Jay*
Mockingbird, <i>Mimus polylottos</i>	House Finch, <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>

\*See: "Some Birds That Eat Suet."

Water Supply

It is essential to supply birds with water for drinking and bathing. A garbage can lid mounted on an old pipe or post a few feet above the ground and filled with an inch or two of water is excellent; do not make the water too deep. Even better than this, if possible, is a small pond with a few lily pads or other aquatic plants. Keeping the water thawed will allow birds to use it even in freezing weather. Some gardeners place water bowls on top of a "cooking" compost pile to keep them from freezing. To prevent the spread of West Nile Virus, add mosquito dunks to prevent larvae from hatching or flush with fresh water daily.

Injured or Motherless Birds

Apparently motherless birds are often not motherless at all – the mother is only hiding, waiting for you to go away. If you find an injured bird, it is usually best to leave it alone; caring for it will require a tremendous amount of time and a good deal of knowledge and skill. If, however, a wounded bird does somehow come into your care, call your local *Audubon Society* for advice. The number is 212-691-7483 in New York City. NYC Audubon 71 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 1523, New York, New York 10010.



Nesting Boxes

The only birds that commonly use nesting boxes are those that nest in tree holes in the wild. In small urban gardens, usually surrounded by building and concrete, the numbers of these birds are limited, but the house sparrow, starling, and the less common black-capped chickadee and house wren can all be expected to use nesting boxes. The entrance to the two birdhouses shown below are small enough to keep out the house sparrow (actually not a sparrow but a weaver finch) and starling – both very undesirable species; these birds – neither of them native to North America – take nesting sites needed by our own native birds and compete with them for food, water, etc. The wood

should receive a natural finish or be painted a dull color. A few small (1/4") holes should be drilled in the floor – or you can simply cut off the corners of the floor – for drainage; a few holes should be drilled near the roof for ventilation. The inner surfaces of the wood should remain rough. Put two or three handfuls of coarse sawdust on the floor of the nest box. Do not use a perch – it is unnecessary and may aid an attacking bird such as a starling. Be sure that the entrance does not face prevailing winds (generally from the northwest in the New York City area) or the birds may get caught in the wind and have difficulty entering or leaving the nest. Boxes should be mounted firmly on a tree or post, as most birds will not use a hanging nesting box. Certain birds, such as the American Robin *Turdus migratorius*, will build nests on a simple nesting platform, about 6" X 8", placed 15 or 20 feet up in a tree. Below are plans for a nesting box for a house wren; a box suitable for the chickadee; and a nesting platform for a house finch or robin:

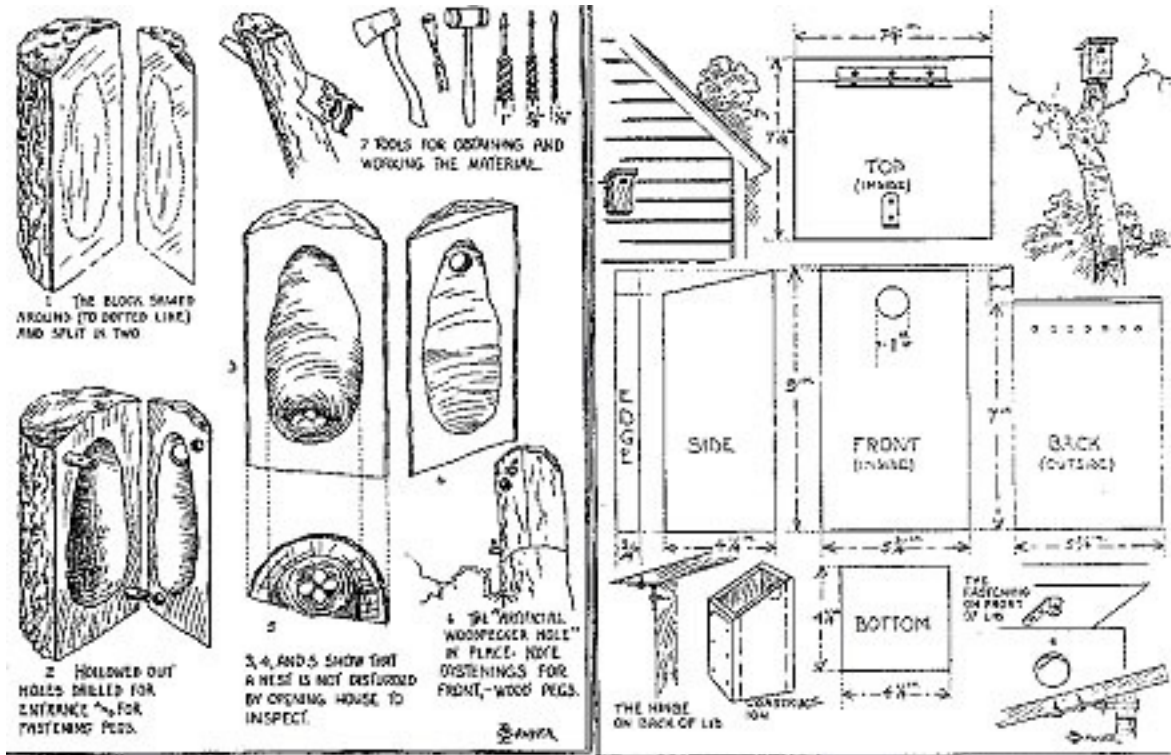


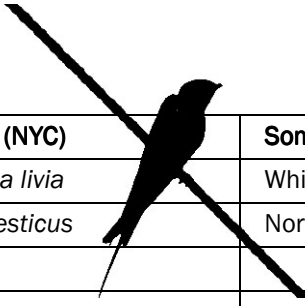
Plate No. 1  
**Chickadee Box.**  
 Interior - 3 1/2" - 4"    Entrance diameter - 1 1/8"  
 Depth - 7 - 9"        Height from ground 6'-15"

Plate No. 2  
**House Wren Box.**  
 Interior - 4"x4"    Entrance diameter - 1"  
 Depth - 7"        Height from ground 6'-15"

How To Observe Birds

When watching birds, you should be careful not to frighten them. Be quiet and move slowly, avoiding sudden, abrupt movements. If you watch birds regularly and carefully you will learn a lot about them. Generally, birds are most visible in the early morning and around dusk. An interesting feature of an urban garden is a bulletin board for gardeners to list the birds sighted and to record any interesting observations.

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<b>Some Year-Round Residents (NYC)</b>	<b>Some Winter Residents (Migrate North in summer)</b>
Rock Dove (Pigeon), <i>Columbia livia</i>	White-Throated Sparrow
House Sparrow, <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Northern Junco, <i>Junco hyemalis</i>
Starling	
House Finch	
Black-Capped Chickadee	<b>Some Summer Residents (Migrate North in winter)</b>
Tufted Titmouse	House wren
Cardinal	American Robin (most), <i>Turdus migratorius</i>
Bluejay	Yellow-Rumped Warbler (most), <i>Dendroica coronatus</i>
Song Sparrow	
Mocking bird	

During the spring and fall migrations many birds pass through the City that are seen at no other time. The best opportunities to see the greatest number of birds are at the peak of the spring migration, about the first three weeks of May. An early morning in Central Park during the spring migration is hard to beat; Van Cortlandt and Pelham Bay parks in the Bronx are also excellent to birding. But probably the best place to see birds in New York City is the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge – easily reached by the IND subway, Broad Channel Station. For information on how and when to go, call 630-0126 and inquire about the guided tours.

### Bibliography

If you are interested in learning more about birds, the following books are excellent and are relatively inexpensive. These books are all paperbacks unless otherwise noted:

<b>Field Guides</b>		
The Golden Guide, <u>Birds of North America</u>	Chandler S. Robbins	St. Martins Press
<u>A Field Guide to the Birds</u>	Roger Tory Peterson	Houghton Mifflin
<u>Birds of New York State</u>	John Bull	Cornell Univ. Press
<u>Nat Geo Field Guide to the Birds of N. America</u>		Nat Geo Society
<u>Songbirds in Your Garden</u>	John K. Terres	Algonquin

An excellent publication about planting for wildlife is issued by the National Garden Clubs of America; also of interest is the Audubon Society, a conservation organization with a special interest in birds, with offices at 71 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 1523, New York, NY 10010. The Society issues several excellent publications. Additional information on area birds may be found on [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org). What ever your interest in birds, they are certainly worth attracting to your garden – they will add life, movement and color to the urban neighborhood.

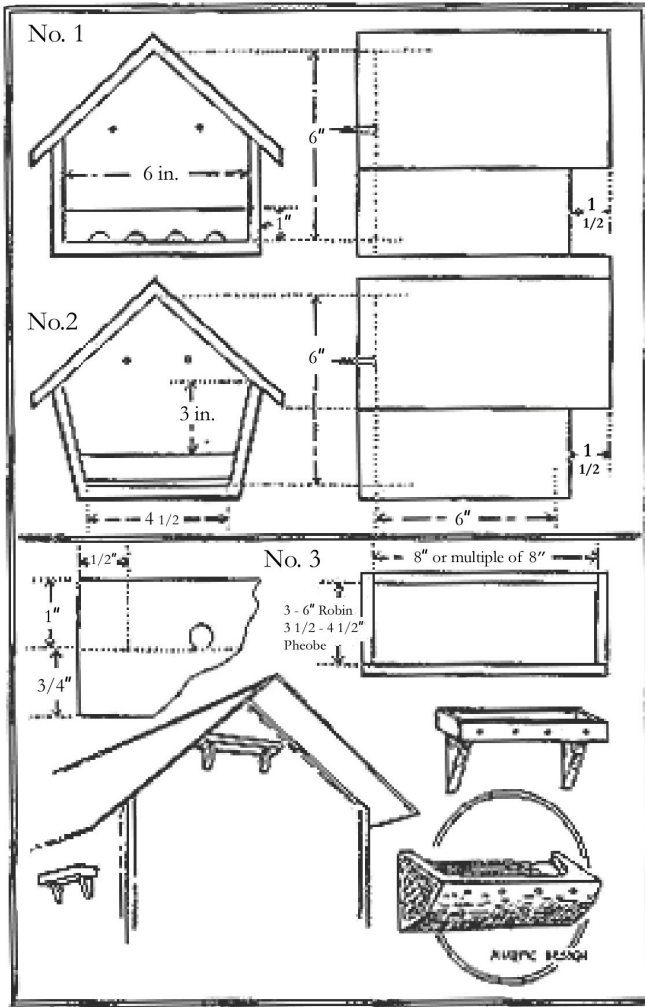


Plate 3: For the House Finch, Robin and Phoebe  
 1 and 2, Nest box for House Finch. The front is left entirely open, except for a cleat to hold the nest in place. Drainage holes may be bored in the bottom of the cleat, or the cleat may be raised a quarter of an inch above the floor. 3, Nesting shelves for Robin and Phoebe.

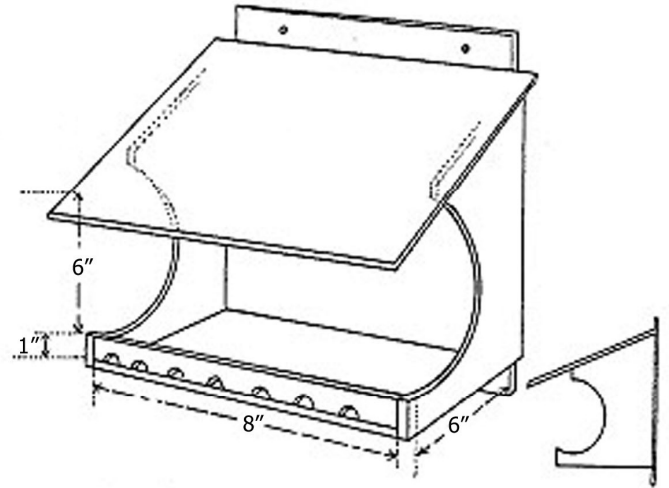


Plate 4: A roofed nesting - shelf for Robins and Phoebes. Length may be 8, or any multiple of 8 inches. Several 1/4 - or 3/8 - inch holes may be bored through the floor for drainage, instead of in the rim as shown here.

Reproduction of Plates 1 through 4 courtesy of The Cranbrook Institute of Science.

A TABLE OF DIMENSIONS  
Nesting Shelves For Birds (One or more sides open)

<i>Kind of Bird</i>	<i>Min. Floor Size</i>	<i>Depth of Box</i>	<i>Preferred Height Above Ground</i>
Robin	6" x 8"	8"	6' - 15'
Barn Swallow	6" x 6"	6"	8' - 12'
Song Sparrow	6" x 6"	6"	1' - 3'
Pheobe	6" x 6"	6"	8' - 12'

Birdhouse Dimensions

<i>Kind of Bird</i>	<i>Floor Size</i>	<i>Box Depth</i>	<i>Ht. of Entrance Above Floor</i>	<i>Diameter of Entrance</i>	<i>Height Above Ground</i>
Bluebird	5"x 5"	8"	6"	1½"	5'-10'
Chickadee	4"x 4"	8"-10"	6"- 8"	1 1/8"	6'-15'
Titmouse	4"x 4"	8"-10"	6"- 8"	1¼"	6'-15'
Nuthatch	4"x 4"	8"-10"	6"- 8"	1¼"	12'-20'
Wrens: House and Bewick's Carolina	4"x 4"	6"-8"	4"- 6"	1"-1¼"	6'-10'
Violet Greenswallow and Tree Swallow	5"x 5"	6"	1"-5"	1½"	10'-15'
Purple Martin	6"x 6"	6"	1"	2½"	15'-20'
House Finch	6"x 6"	6"	4"	2"	8'-12'
Starling	6"x 6"	16"-18"	14"-16"	2"	10'-25'
Crested Flycatcher	6"x 6"	8"-10"	6"-8"	2"	8'-20'
Flicker	7"x 7"	16"-18"	14"-16"	2½"	6'-20'
Woodpeckers: Golden Fronted, Redheaded Downy Hairy	6"x 6" 4"x 4" 6"x 6"	12"-15" 8"-10" 12"-15"	9"-12" 6"-8" 9"-12"	2" 1¼" 1½"	12'-20' 6'-20' 12'-20'
Owls: Screech Saw-whet Barn	8"x 8" 6"x 6" 10"x18"	12"-15" 10"-12" 15"-18"	9"-12" 8"-10" 4"	3" 2½" 6"	10'-30' 12'-20' 12'-18'
Sparrow hawk	8"x 8"	12"-15"	9"-12"	3"	10'-30'
Wood duck	10"x18"	10"-24"	12"-16"	4"	10'-20'