Using Native Plants to Feed the Birds

by Kim Thompson

Birds need food-- and lots of it! Consider that just one songbird feeds its baby chicks hundreds of caterpillars each day. Multiply that by hundreds of birds and you can see their dilemma. Thankfully, there's an easy solution—go native—native plants that is. Native plants are those that thrive in growing conditions that mimic their natural environment. They often have fewer pest or disease problems, and require less supplemental water, fertilizer and general maintenance.

So, what should we plant? You have probably heard people use the old adage, "Variety is the spice of life." This goes for birds too. Choosing an assortment of native plants will attract many different birds. Use a combination of grasses, shrubs, trees, and flowering perennials to create a smorgasbord of feeding choices. To feed baby birds, use River Birch, Buttonbush, or Passionflower. Consider Yaupon Holly and Flowering Dogwood for berries and oaks, Joe Pye Weed, and Pink Muhly Grass for seeds and nuts. You can also find additional Virginia native varieties at https://www.plantvirginianatives.org/plant-southeast-virginia-natives

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Buttonbush

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Pink Muhly Grass

A word of caution before you begin your new habitat—be watchful for invasive plants like Kudzu and Chinese Privet. These plants can have dire consequences for birds. Check the list at https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/document/nh-invasive-plant-list-2023.pdf to keep our feathered friends safe. In the end, using native plants creates an abundant food source for birds. Start small or go big—either way, it's win-win for our feathered friends!

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Kudzu

References:

Bringing Nature Home *by Doug Tallamy*; see also Homegrown National Park https://homegrownnationalpark.org/doug-tallamy/

National Invasive Species Information Center (NISIC) Species Profiles List https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/species-profiles-list

Virginia Department of Conversation and Recreation – Virginia Invasive Plant Species List https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invsppdflist

Native Plant Gardening for Birds, Bees & Butterflies *by Jaret C. Daniels*

Native Plants for Birds (Coastal Plain) www.ncaudubon.org

Native Plants for Southeast Virginia-including Hampton Roads Region. Published by the Botanical Society of America. https://www.plantvirginianatives.org/plant-southeast-virginia-natives

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/blog/backyard-birding-attracting-birds-with-native-plants

Virginia Native Plant Society https://vnps.org/southhamptonroads/