



A Bird in Hand Is Worth Two in the Bush

by Lisa Strange, FYN Community Association Coordinator

Of the nine Florida-friendly principles, Attracting Wildlife is the easiest and most fun principle to accomplish, in my opinion. All one needs to do is to plant the plants that provide food and shelter. Water, also, is essential for wildlife survival. Knowledge of plant's characteristics is important prior to planting for attracting wildlife. An ideal landscape uses native plants to provide a year-round food supply, such as berries, fruit, seeds, and nuts. A simple dish or saucer will provide the water source for the critters. Shelter can be provided by dense evergreen trees such as podocarpus, pines, and oaks. Shrubs, such as yaupon holly, Ilex vomitoria, 'Nana Schillings' Walter's viburnum, Viburnum obovatum, wax myrtle, Myrica cerifera and saw palmettos, Serenoa repens or thorny shrubs such as wild lime, Zanthoxylum fagara or Natal plum, Carissa macrocarpa and vines are perfect cover as well as food supply. Cavities in dead trees, brush piles, fallen limbs, and even fallen leaves

provide shelter that allows wildlife to breed, nest, hide from predators, sleep, and feed. Bluebirds, woodpeckers, and flying squirrels depend on openings in dead wood.

Mother Nature recycles everything. Most of our yard trash that people throw away can be used by some critter somewhere in the food chain. Birds eat insect eggs laid in leaf debris. We want to cater to every taste in the critter community. Insect-eating birds need plants that attract insects. The tiniest of flowers, such as wild coffee, *Psychotria nervosa*, New Jersey tea, *Ceanothus americanus*, pennyroyal, *Piloblephis rigida*, or rouge plant, *Rivina humilis*, attract insects which attract birds, but don't necessarily attract humans because of their inconspicuous nature.

Feed the babies. To attract butterflies the species-specific larval food plants need to be available. Caterpillars can defoliate a milkweed plant in a day. But don't fret; these plants that provide food for caterpillars are naturally adapted to the abuse.

To provide food and shelter year-round, diversification in plant material's texture, size, and species allow for the flower, fruit, and dropping of leaves in different seasons. This fluctuation is just as desirable for humans. Design the landscape in layers. Providing vegetation at various levels such as big trees, small trees, large shrubs, small shrubs, wildflowers, vines to groundcovers, and you will support animals that feed and nest on the ground, waist level, and higher.

Birds add movement, sound, color, and interest to the landscape and are Mother Nature's best patron for eating mosquitoes and other insects to keep balance. Certain trees and shrubs are particularly attracted to bird specific species. There are many others that are more adapted to the north and not so tolerable in the south. The plants suggested below are trees, shrubs, and vines that survive in the north, central, and south Florida zones.

Trees that attract hummingbirds are mimosa, *Albizia* spp., and bottlebrush, *Callistemon* spp. Trees that attract other birds are dahoon holly, *Ilex cassine*, mulberry, *Morus rubra*, slash pine, *Pinus elliotti*, and live oak, *Quercus virginiana*.

Shrubs that attract hummingbirds are firebush, *Hamelia patens*, and firespike, *Odontonema strictum*. The firebush is not as cold hardy and will die back to ground during a freeze. Shrubs that attract other birds are marlberry, *Ardisia paniculata*, beautyberry, *Callicarpa Americana*, and orange jessamine, *Murraya paniculata*.

Vines that attract hummingbirds that will survive in north, central, and south Florida are the firethorn, *Pyracantha coccinea*, and the wild grape, *Vitis* spp.

Portions of this material are based on information provided by the Florida Native Plant Society.

Contact your local county UF/IFAS Extension office for more information on Florida-friendly landscaping or visit floridayards.org. To order one (1) free Florida-friendly handbook and plant list from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, go to WaterMatters.org. For more information on the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program go to <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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