

KPOV – *The Point*  
Gardening: Get Good At It  
“Native Birds and Gardeners”  
February 1, 2022

Spring is just around the corner and American robins are a favorite harbinger of spring. Though still abundant, robins are on the decline in urban settings and could use some help from homeowners and especially gardeners. You can help birds thrive right where you live. Make your yard more bird-friendly by creating a patch of vibrant habitat that attracts colorful birds and their sweet melodies. If you don't have a yard, you can still help birds by creating a native plant container garden on your patio or balcony. Even very small patches of habitat provide tired, hungry birds with exactly what they need, particularly during migration.

It is helpful, when designing and planting your bird garden to understand what birds are doing during different seasons.

In **Spring**, birds are building their nests to raise their young. Leaving a few small piles of plant stems and twigs from winter, as well as early spring pruning, provides birds with plenty of construction material.

During the **Summer** birds are seeking relief from summer heat and pests. Filling shallow depressions in rocks with water gives birds something to drink to cool down. A spot of bare ground can provide a place for birds to take “dust baths” to get rid of pesky parasites.

**Autumn** finds birds eating high-fat seeds and fruits to build up reserves for migration and winter survival. I leave a few seed heads on plants to help provide the food that will fatten up the birds for winter.

Just like us, birds are searching for shelter from the cold during **Winter**. If you have the space, planting evergreen trees and shrubs that provide fruit in the garden will give birds protection from the harsh winter weather.

Suburban areas with a mixture of lawns, flowerbeds, gardens, shrubs and trees provide the variety that can support robins. Because robins enjoy small areas of grass, it's important not to use pesticides that can kill or harm robins. Pesticides also may kill worms and insects, a major food source for robins. Robins are affected when they eat the poisoned worms or berries.

Robins help control insect populations. They also are very important for spreading seeds and for the growth of new trees and bushes in new areas. The fruit they eat contains seeds, which robins may drop in other places.

If you'd like to attract robins at bird feeders, feed them chopped apples, berries and mealworms. They don't eat birdseed. They prefer to forage for their food in lawns and open areas.

Just like our plants, it's important to provide water for robins because they like to drink and bathe regularly. A shallow pond or large puddle with a muddy area is ideal since robins use mud for nest building. Birdbaths with misters are great and drippers will also appeal to these birds. I have a curved-out rock that I fill with water year-round. During the winter, I place a flat ‘bird

bath' heater in the rock that melts the snow and provides hilarious bird viewing from my kitchen window.

Remember, if you don't have a lot of space to garden, that's where container gardens come in. Pots and planters come in many shapes and sizes and colors. Container gardens are easy to fit in tight spaces from window boxes and hanging baskets to patios, balconies or railings. You may not be able to provide shrubs and trees that birds use for nesting, but there are plenty of plants that will fit in a pot and also provide seeds, fruit, or insects for birds to eat.

Just like any other new adventure, gardening for robins or any bird can be challenging. It's a good idea to find resources that can help you along the way. There are lots of gardening books to answer basic questions. Check local sources for classes.

Key points to remember include:

- **Give Birds What They Need** - Birds need food, water, shelter, and places to nest. Learn about the many ways your outdoor space can provide them with an abundance of resources.
- **Gather Your Local Knowledge** - Learn about your unique location, the birds that visit your region, and the plants that are native to your area.
- **Dig In!** - Get expert tips on how to add new elements to your space, choose bird-friendly plants, and help those plants thrive.
  - You can increase vertical diversity in your landscape by adding more layers of vegetation between the ground and the treetops.
  - Providing food and cover year-round requires a variety of trees, shrubs, and other plants
  - Curves and clusters are visually appealing to us, and often will be more useful to wildlife than linear or solitary plantings.
  - Sources of food, cover, and water need to be located near each other.

#### Resources:

OSU Extension Service publication: [The Wildlife Garden: Build Nest Boxes for Wild Birds](#)

"The Wildlife Garden: Feed Wild Birds: <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1554>

"Survival by Degrees" <https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees>

Central Oregon Master Gardeners <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/central>