Attracting Birds to Your Backyard

By Dolores Muller, MGV

To songbirds, hummingbirds, butterflies and other wildlife, the typical landscape resembles an unfriendly desert. Close cropped lawns, sheared foundation shrubs and dead-headed flowers means no place to nest, no food to eat and nowhere to hide. Fortunately, any landscape can become a haven for birds and wildlife - and for people that share it.

Bird friendly yards and gardens are filled with flowers from spring until frost, brilliant berries and glistening water along with dazzling birds and butterflies. Since low maintenance is another advantage, its easy to see instead of a varied, long term food supply. To encourage birds to stick around you need to create a landscape that will allow them to find food daily. Birds that over winter will need to find food 365 days of the year.

There are 4 things that birds and wildlife need and if you can provide any one or all four of these things you will attract more birds to your yard so you can enjoy...."Nature, the Greatest Show on Earth."

The 4 basic components of a habitat needed by all wildlife are: food, water, cover and a place to raise young. If you can only do

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Local Activities of Interest

Seasonal Cooking: Fresh & Local
Where: Russell Dining Room at SCC
When: Thursday, April 14th from 6:00pm to 8:30pm

Admission: $15
“This class (taught by Kathy Byron) is a culinary journey through the fresh and local produce of the Sandhills including how to use local food that benefits health and has a positive impact on our community and environment. Hands-on lessons from farms participating in the Sandhills Farm to Table Cooperative allow participants to put together a “tasting” to share with classmates as part of the ‘Lessons from the Schoolyard Series.’”

Sandhills Horticultural Society & Landscape Gardening Student Plant Sale
Where: Steed Hall at SCC
When: Saturday, April 16th; 8am-12pm
Pre-order or buy day of sale. Call Tricia Mabe at 695-3882 for a plant list or to order.

Weymouth Plant Sale
Where: Weymouth Center
When: Tuesday, April 19th; 9am-12pm
Event sponsored by the Dirt Gardeners of Weymouth.

Have Gardening Questions?

Call the MGV Hot Line

March through October
Monday through Friday
10 a.m. to noon
Phone: 910-947-3188

Yellow Rump Warbler
Attracting Birds to Your Yard (concluded)

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one thing then water is the most important. All animals need drinking water to survive and some need it for bathing or breeding well. Create a rain garden or add a bird bath. Even small water features will attract more birds. It has been shown that the sound of water gurgling will increase the number of birds that visit your yard.

Food is the second important component. Native plants provide wildlife with nectar, seeds and berries used by a variety of birds. Feeders can supplement natural food sources. The seed that appeals to the greatest variety of birds is black oiled sunflower seeds. Besides seeds; suet cakes, hummingbird nectar and fruit can be offered. Do not use the nectar with red dye. Instead make your own by mixing 4 to 1 water with sugar. Boil the water in the microwave about 2 to 3 minutes, stir in the sugar and cool to room temperature. Large quantities can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a month.

Cover and reproductive areas: Birds need shelter from bad weather and predators and a place to reproduce. Provide a variety of deciduous and evergreen plants of various sizes. Some birds like to nest high up and others low to the ground. Give them many choices. The greater variety of plants the more species of birds you will appeal to in your yard. Supplement with bird houses that have holes the correct size to accommodate particular birds. A little research can give you this information.

And by all means put away the chemicals. Spraying chemicals kills as many good bugs as it does bad ones. Natural gardens are better for you and your family as well as birds.

More Local Activities of Interest

Pinehurst Garden Club Plant Sale
Where: Village Center of Pinehurst
When: Saturday, April 30th; 10am-3pm
Located in parking lot next to Given Memorial Library. Pre-order recommended.
Call 295-4548 or 295-1765 to order. Hanging baskets, herbs, ferns, and other plants for sale the day of the sale.
Money used for community beautification projects & a full scholarship to a student at SCC.

The Moore County Farmers Markets
The Farmers Markets are opening this month. Early season produce such as fresh greens, radishes, broccoli, strawberries, spring onions and sweet potatoes and honey should be available. The recipes on page 3 are ones that you may want to try using our county’s wonderful locally-grown produce. The days, times and locations of the Moore County Farmers Markets will be available at http://www.co.moore.nc.us/index.php/farmers-market?lang=
**Plant of the Month — Tomato**  
**By: Susan Strine**

**Cultivars for our area:**

**Determinate varieties** (short lived plants that bear 4-6 weeks, typical height to 4'):
- Celebrity
- Mountain Pride
- Mountain Spring
- Mountain Fresh
- Patio

**Indeterminate varieties:** Big Beef, Whopper, Early Girl, Big Girl

**Note:** Virtually all heirloom varieties (Brandywine, Cherokee Purple, German Johnson) are indeterminant. Indeterminant tomatoes taste better, as a rule.

**Days to harvest:** 75-85

**Requirements:** Tomato plants need 8-10 hours of full sun each day. With sandy or clay soil it is very beneficial to dig organic matter into the soil. It is a good idea to have a soil test done ahead of planting time to learn the pH and what nutrients are missing. In our area, the soil will almost certainly need a lime application and it should be applied several months before planting. Apply ½ cup of starter fertilizer (3-4 tablespoons of 8-8-8 in a gallon of water) around each plant at planting time. Side dress 4-6 inches from plant’s stem with 2-3 tablespoons 8-8-8 when plants begin to set fruit and every 4-6 weeks throughout the growing season. Water to 6-8 inches deep once a week and mulch with 3-4 inches of organic mulch. Use tomato cages or stakes to hold plants and fruit off the ground. Drive the stake a foot deep. Never plant in the same location two years in a row to help prevent diseases.

**Seeding and Transplants:** Set plants with at least 50 percent of their length below ground. There should be good air circulation around plants. Space plants no closer than 18 inches apart and 3 to 4 feet between rows. Seeding depths should be half an inch. Plant after April 15 and when soil temperature 60 degrees or start seed indoors in pots in early March.

**Plant Problems:** Check out these Websites:
- [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8107.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8107.html)

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**GARLIC BROCCOLI SPEARS**

Cook 1 lb. of fresh broccoli (cut into spears) with a small amount of water until crisp-tender. Meanwhile, combine 2 tbsp. olive or other vegetable oil, 1 tbsp. lemon juice, 1 minced garlic clove, 1/4 tsp. salt and 1/8 tsp. pepper. Drain broccoli and place in a serving dish. Add the oil-lemon mixture and toss to coat. Yield: 4-6 servings. (Source: Shirley Glaab, Hattiesburg, MS, published in *Country Magazine*)

**SPINACH SALAD WITH HONEY DRESSING**

In a large bowl, combine fresh spinach (torn); a small head of iceberg lettuce (torn); 2 green onions, thinly sliced; 3 tbsp. chopped green pepper; 1 medium cucumber, quartered and sliced; 2 large navel oranges, cut into bite-size pieces; and 1/2 cup sunflower seeds. In a small bowl, combine 3/4 cup mayonnaise, 2 tbsp. honey and 1 tbsp. lemon juice. Pour over the salad and toss to coat. Serve immediately. Yield: 8-10 servings. (Source: Dee Simpson, Jefferson, TX, published in *Country Magazine*)

**SWEET POTATO SALAD**

Place 2 lbs. of sweet potatoes in a large saucepan and cover with water. Cover and boil gently until the potatoes can easily be pierced with the tip of a sharp knife (about 30-45 minutes). Drain and let cool before peeling and dicing. In a large bowl, combine 1 1/2 c. mayonnaise, 2 tsp. Dijon mustard, and 1/4 tsp. salt. Stir in 4 chopped hard-cooked eggs, 1 1/2 c. finely chopped celery, and 8 sliced green onions. Add potatoes and stir gently to mix. Cover and refrigerate for 2-4 hours. Yield: 8-10 servings. (Source: Unknown)
When you start mowing, don't remove anymore than 50% of the grass blade at any one mowing. The clippings should be small enough to fall between the grass. Don't collect them unless they are heavy enough to smother the grass.

Apply a pre-emergent for crabgrass and weed control in lawns.

Check the State Extension on the web for information on the care of your lawn. The care depends on the type of grass you have. Their web address is: http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/

When shopping for annual flowers to brighten up your garden next month, look for plants with lots of buds but which are not yet in bloom. Plants not yet in bloom will actually bloom sooner and will become established and grow faster. Pull one of the plants out of the pack and look for white roots. If roots are tan and wrapped around the soil ball, this indicates the plant has been in the pack too long and it will not grow as robustly when planted.

The average frost free date for this area is April 15th. Wait till after that date to plant bedding plants and tomatoes and peppers.

Fertilize existing shrubs to boost spring growth. Fertilize spring flowering shrubs after blooming.

Begin spray program for roses and fruit trees. Try not to spray insecticides on any plant when it is blooming. You will kill pollinating insects.

Prune spring blooming shrubs after they have finished blooming.

**Dig This** has been produced by the Moore County Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) in conjunction with the North Carolina Extension Service. Its purpose is to share with the general public some of the MGV’s enthusiasm for gardening and some of their activities. The information contained herein is based on sources that the Master Gardener Volunteers believe to be reliable, but does not represent that it is accurate or complete.

Look for the next issue of **Dig This** the first of May. There a promise of an article called “So you want to grow grass” and a list of plants that are resistant to being eaten by deer. There will be some more recipes and other tidbits of information that the MGV would like to share with you.

**Copies of Dig This can be found on the website below:**

http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/moore/MasterGardener.html

Hot Line # - 910-947-3188