

The Importance of Bird Houses



The birds that visit your backyard are a part of the whole ecosystem. The importance of bird houses can't be understated if you want to attract birds to your yard. Having a home for your feathered friends adds some interest to your yard and makes sure the birds will keep visiting.

Bird Houses are often called nesting boxes because they provide a safe place for birds to build their nests, protected from the elements and predators. In the winter months, they give visiting birds a place to snuggle together for warmth away from the cold air.

There are many bird house benefits, other than just giving visiting birds a place to stay. If you attract them to your yard by having bird friendly bird houses, and adding fresh clean water to the yard, the birds will help out in many ways.

The following are ways that birds can help us and the environment:

- **Controlling pests.** Since birds eat insects, they will help to eliminate unwanted pests in your yard and free you from needing to use otherwise harmful pesticides.
- **Weed control.** Birds love to eat weed seeds. Gardeners do not like to weed. A Win win situation for all!
- **Flower pollination.** There are many birds who love to sip nectar from flowers and help to pollinate. With the bee population diminishing, attracting birds who do this is sure to benefit your garden.
- **Conservation.** Birds love native plants. If you grow these and then attract birds to your yard with bird friendly birdhouses, you will find that your gardening chores will diminish.

Birds are an important part of any back yard garden and the importance of bird houses is more than just attracting birds to your yard. Choose the right bird house to ensure that you'll get all of the benefits of having birds nearby.

Common Backyard Birds Found In Illinois

In recent years, backyard bird feeding and other nature-related activities have become some of the most popular past times in the United States.

Providing bird feeders, bird houses, water and wildlife friendly landscaping can provide hours of enjoyment for you and your family.

Many birds benefit from trees, shrubs and flowers that are native to Illinois. These plantings provide food and safe nesting places.

Pictured here are some of the birds most likely to be found at feeders and in bird houses in urban and suburban areas.



The **white-breasted nuthatch** can be found in many wooded habitats including your backyard. Watch them come down the tree headfirst.



Blue jays are aggressive and won't back down to potential predators like hawks and owls.



Watch the **black-capped chickadees** at your feeders as they take a single seed and fly up into the tree where they will pulverize and eat it.



The **downy woodpecker** is the smallest woodpecker in Illinois. The male has a small red spot on the back of his head.



Don't be insulted if the **American robins** don't use your feeders. They are everywhere in cities, but don't normally come to feeders.



Mourning doves thrive in open habitats where they eat waste grain and weed seeds. They are widespread in Illinois.



Male **house finches** have a red head and chest. Females, which are brown and streaked, are often mistaken for female English house sparrows.



The **ruby-throated hummingbird** is the only hummingbird species that normally nests east of the Mississippi River.



House wrens will take advantage of bird houses provided for them. Remember, larger birds such as European Starlings will take over any birdhouse with an opening greater than 1.5 inches in diameter. Wrens and chickadees only need 1.25 inches.



The beautiful **northern cardinal** sometimes provides the only splash of color during a cold, gray winter. Females are a brownish yellow. They love sunflower and safflower seeds.



Cedar waxwings are a great reason to plant hawthorn, holly or viburnum varieties that produce berries. They get their name from the colored patches on their wings that look like the sealing wax once used to close envelopes.



The **common grackle** is a native species that thrives in areas disturbed and manipulated by human activity. They gather in large flocks and are seen in both cities and the countryside. Careful timing when mowing fields and ditches can help discourage birds like grackles.



Watch for the **American goldfinch** (winter plumage) and **dark-eyed junco** at your winter feeding stations. Goldfinches stay around, they just molt in a drab set of feathers. Juncos are here just for the winter.

The sunny **American goldfinch** (summer plumage) is a welcome visitor to backyard feeders. They are also seen in prairies, roadsides and forest edges.

The **white-throated sparrow** is the one true sparrow you are most likely to see browsing on the ground below your feeders in spring and fall.