

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Thiessen January 2, 2026

Post Rock Extension District Horticulture Agent

Landscaping for Birds

Attracting birds into our landscapes and gardens is an activity that can bring much enjoyment over the cold, dreary winter months. Bringing birds as well as other pollinators and wildlife near your home also helps manage unwanted insect populations and maintain the ecological balance of outdoor environments. Now is a great time to start your landscape design to create a welcoming yard for birds.

Birds need three basic things to survive: food, water, and shelter. These elements can easily be supplied in your backyard. One of the main elements for attracting many species of birds is a wide variety of plants arranged into sheltered areas of shrubs and trees, open areas, and wet areas around ponds or streams. Start your bird landscape by observing what plants and other elements you already have. The predominant habitat type in the area will determine which bird species can be attracted to your yard. Next, determine what needs to be added to your area to make it a more attractive environment for wildlife.

Diversity is key when landscaping for birds. Utilize a diverse range of plants to provide food and shelter for birds. Fill the yard with fruit or seed-bearing plants for the best habitat development. A great example is evergreen holly. This plant has berries that are attractive, food for the birds, and also provides shelter in winter. Whenever possible, use native plants. Our native birds are adapted to native plants, which are often drought-resistant, cold, and heat-tolerant. It is best to supply plants that will have some food or shelter during all seasons. Don't forget about the fall when birds are migrating, and incorporate some winter berry plants for non-migratory species preparing for winter. Be careful using pesticides in landscapes where you are attracting wildlife. Use them as a last resort, and remember that birds are often predators of insect pests.

It is also fun to draw birds in using different types of feeders. Place these feeders where they can easily be seen from the house and enjoy the activity of the birds. The most common are platform feeders, tube feeders, suet feeders, and hanging feeders. The type of birds you will attract depends on the type of feed you put out, the type of feeder, and the location.

Water is important in the winter, and often sources of open water may be scarce. Water can be supplied by bird baths, shallow edges of decorative ponds, or natural streams, ponds, and lakes. Bird baths should have a clear area of ten feet in diameter around the bath to prevent predators from sneaking up on birds while they drink. The water level should be no more than two inches. Placing a few rocks in the center will make it easier for birds to use. For continued use in the winter months, a bird bath heater can be used.

Birds require shelter for nesting as well as protection from predators and inclement weather. Thorny and densely branched trees and shrubs, such as shrub rose, blackberries, raspberries, aromatic sumac, and viburnum provide excellent shelter. Evergreens provide shelter during this time of the year. Many grasses, both ornamental and native, may serve as resources for food, nesting materials, or shelter. Vines on fences or other supports can turn a part of the yard into prime real estate for food, nesting, and shelter. You can also provide bird houses and nesting boxes to attract birds.

Bringing wildlife into your landscape can be enjoyable if done correctly. For a list of recommended plants to use for attracting birds, contact your local Extension Office. K-State Extension has a variety of resources for all your gardening and landscaping needs. Stop by or give us a call with your questions.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at cthiessen@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (785-738-3597).