

gardening

FOR THE BIRDS

Adding plants for beauty,
food and shelter

By Pat Leuchtman
leisure Columnist

While you are making up your garden plans and lists give a thought to feeding the birds as well as your family. It's a joy to have birds nesting, feeding and singing on your property, and they are also useful because they help keep harmful insects and pests under control.

I plan to grow a stand of sunflowers so that I'll have a harvest of nutritious seeds for my children, chickens and the wild birds, but in planning my windbreak and ornamental plantings I'm also thinking about what plants will benefit the birds. As part of my windbreak I'm planting autumn olive (*eleagnus umbellata*) a wide spreading shrub with silvery green leaves that produces small creamy-white flowers in May and red berries in the fall. Songbirds and gamebirds like quail and pheasant find these berries delicious.

This shrub grows densely, up to 12 feet high and it will spread eight feet wide providing shelter as well as food. It is not demanding and requires only ordinary soil and moisture, and at least one-half day of sun.

The Russian olive (*eleagnus angustifolia*) has similar culture requirements, but does not grow as densely as the autumn olive. It will reach a height of 20 feet and spreads wide so again, it is not something to plant in a restricted space. It blooms early and in July the small flowers give

way to yellow berries that are a favorite with song and gamebirds.

Bittersweet is a twining vine which can be grown on fences and against walls. Its red-orange berries are often grown to be used in dried flower arrangements in the fall, but they are also attractive to birds.

American bittersweet (*celastrus scandens*) is hardy and will thrive in sun or shade. Some people like to train this vine up a dead tree and this works well, but take care around living trees because the vine will grow vigorously for 20 or 40 feet and can strangle them.

Ever since I lived in Maine and first saw banks of *rosa rugosa* growing along the seashore I have loved this plant. It is beautiful with dark green crinkled and leathery leaves and an abundance of white or pink single rose blossoms that perfume the air with their delicate scent. In the fall, fruits called hips form and cooks sometimes use them in jelly and tea; they are very rich in Vitamin C. Birds love these hips too.

Don't mistake the *rosa multiflora* for the *rosa rugosa*. *Rosa multiflora* is listed in some catalogs as a "living fence" and it will indeed provide bird food and shelter, but it self sows freely and in many areas it is considered a weed because it so easily outgrows its bounds.

One of the loveliest trees in the spring is the dogwood. There are many varieties from the cornus florida, a small white tree that is covered with white blossoms in May, the c. florida "Rubra" a pink dogwood, to the c. kousa "Summer



Stars" which will bloom in August. There are dogwoods with variegated foliage and double flowers, but they all produce red fruit in the fall which will please you and the birds.

Dogwoods prefer a well-drained, slightly acid soil that is rich in organic matter. It needs a good supply of moisture so definitely water it while it is getting established and if it is planted in full sun you may want to mulch. It will also thrive in partial shade.

The cotoneaster is a graceful shrub that is hardy as far north as

Toronto and it is prized for the foliage that will last into the winter and for the bright red berries that will last all winter long providing the birds with a never ending buffet. It needs only ordinary soil and will grow in full or partial sun and makes a handsome hedge.

Feeding birds doesn't necessarily mean only setting out a feeder that you have to keep filled. It can mean adding a few plants to your landscaping that will beautify your yard as well as providing food and shelter for the birds.

The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service:

Now is the time to:

- cut out old fruiting canes of raspberries.
- contact the Franklin County Extension Service to receive "The Garden Gate" monthly. It contains gardening information and is free and available to the public.
- take cuttings from spindly houseplants.

Note:

- Soilless mixes are good for starting seeds indoors.
- Force pussy willows, forsythia and spirea easily indoors.
- Plan to grow at least a salad garden this year.
- Mealy bugs (cottony like masses) on houseplants can be controlled by using a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol. □

Garden Calendar



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