

TUCSON BOTANICAL GARDENS BIRD GARDEN SIGNS

Dead Heads Welcome

Well-meaning gardeners frequently snip off shriveled-up flowers. But when those flowers dry up, the birds get interested because the plant is at its seed-bearing stage. If we cut off the seed heads, we are eliminating the birds' source of food.

Attract Birds the Natural Way

What do birds need for survival? Three basics: food, shelter, and water. We can provide food and shelter with the plants that we grow. Our gardening decisions can help create habitat for our feathered friends.

Berried Treasure

Many birds eat the fruits of wild plants. Thrashers, pyrrhuloxias, mockingbirds, and others will visit the ripe fruits of prickly pear. Small berries like those of wolfberry and desert hackberry are also feasted upon by birds. Juicy fruits provide moisture as well as nourishment for desert animals.

Seedy Characters

Many birds such as quail, cardinals, and finches feed mainly on seeds. We can feed birds the natural way by putting out seed-producing plants. Among the best seed providers are members of the Sunflower Family such as brittlebush, desert marigold, and desert zinnia.

The Saguaro Does it All

Gila woodpeckers and gilded flickers excavate nesting holes in the saguaro. Abandoned holes become prime real estate for other cavity-nesting birds including small owls, flycatchers, purple martins, and kestrels. In late spring, saguaros bear showy white flowers that are pollinated by bats, insects, and some birds, particularly white-winged doves. The flowers mature into pulpy red fruits that provide food and moisture for desert wildlife.

Pretty with a Purpose

Most beautiful flowers have evolved to attract pollinators—creatures that come to feed on the sweet nectar of the flower and then carry pollen from one plant to another. Many pollinators are insects, but some birds, particularly hummingbirds, also play an important role.

Sweet Stuff

Hummingbirds are attracted to tubular-shaped flowers in vivid colors, but they are not the only birds that visit nectar-rich blossoms. Orioles often feed at agave flowers, and nectar-seeking verdins may pierce the bases of many flowers like Mexican honeysuckle, Cape honeysuckle, and penstemon.

Don't Bug Out

Insects and plants have co-existed together for millennia, and a healthy bird garden will have many insects. Besides butterflies, bees, and other pollinators at the flowers, there will be innumerable tiny insects on stems and leaves. Most songbirds eat insects at least part of the time. Insects rarely do any permanent damage to the plants, and wild birds help keep their numbers in check.

Gimme Shelter

Birds rely on dense trees and shrubs for a variety of reasons—as places to build their nests, places to roost at night, places to hide from predators, and shelter from the weather.



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