

Volume 16

Trees for Wildlife

Linnea West, TN Urban Forestry Council



Bird photos by Jon Graham

For the joy of a garden filled with birdsong, young fledglings, butterflies, bees, and year-round beauty, make native trees the backbone of your landscape. Native trees have evolved as an integral part of the local food chain and are ideally suited to water and temperature fluctuations of the mid-south. Oaks and hickories, magnolias, pines, maples, birch and beech give us wind protection and welcoming shade, hold soil in place and provide food and nesting sites for birds, insects and mammals.

When selecting trees and shrubs, ponder this:

96% of all terrestrial birds depend on insects for food.

This includes our backyard songbirds. Berries and seeds, no matter how abundant, are not enough. Birds require the dense protein and fat of caterpillars, mosquitoes, flies and other insects to reproduce, raise their young, and have the strength to migrate. Baby birds in the nest only eat juicy insect life. Their busy parents flying to and fro need substantive protein and fat, too!

The chickadees at your feeder this winter may consume bushels of sunflower seeds, but come summer, they will be searching for insect protein. Chickadees rear their young exclusively on caterpillars. How many caterpillars does it take to produce a nest of chickadees?...10,000 caterpillars to fledge a single clutch! Multiply this by all the chickadees, robins, bluebirds, cardinals, woodpeckers, finches, sparrows... and we see the need to provide nature's host trees for the insect food of our beloved songbirds.

Let's welcome birds by planting the natives they are hoping to find when choosing a home. They will reward us many times over with their beauty, song, and insatiable appetite for insects we consider pests.

Berries and fruit are relished as part of a bird's diet – and no fruit is as nutritious and perfectly evolved to entice our songbirds as those on native shrubs and trees. Acorns, hickories, beechnuts

and seeds from maples, birch, and pine are eagerly harvested by birds and mammals alike.

Butterfly larvae and adults are also attracted by native trees. Consider that our native **Oaks** support 534 different butterfly and moth species, **Black Cherry** supports 456, **Hickory** 200, **Birch** 413, **Willow** 455....to name only a few.

Combine these caterpillars and other insects, nuts, berries, seeds and fruit, along with nesting sites and you have a treasure trove for wildlife with even a small number of native trees.

There are many striking flowering specimens of large and small natives. Consider **Yellowwood** (*Cladrastis kentukea*) with its 12" long panicles of fragrant white blooms in spring, loved for its nectar by hummingbirds and bees; mature height and spread of 50'.

Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) perfumes the air from April-June with lemon-scented white blossoms, followed by dark red seed follicles with bright red berries; 15 to 20'.

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier laevis*) is a graceful, multi-stemmed understory tree with early spring white flowers followed by delicious (to birds and people alike) black berries, and red fall leaves – Could one ask for anything more?

Other small to medium native trees include:

Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) with large white bracts, 'chocolate-drop' flower buds, red berries, and red fall foliage.

PawPaw (*Asimina triloba*) – large obovate leaves and delicious yellow strawberry-banana fruit; larval host for the TN state butterfly, Zebra Swallowtail.

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) – bright pink tiny pea-blossoms running along zig-zag twigs; seedpods provide food for birds and small mammals through the winter.

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) – a multitude of tiny yellow blossoms heralding spring; larval host for the Spicebush Swallowtail.

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) –fragrant early blooms; lobed leaves like mittens turning yellow, orange, and red in fall; blue berries relished by birds; the source of spicy sassafras tea.

For an evergreen screen to replace invasive alien privet, look to:

Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) – Red berries contrast vividly with narrow, glossy evergreen leaves, amenable to pruning; and

Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) – rugged peeling red bark, fragrant dense needle-like foliage and blue berry-like cones favored by birds.

These are but a sample of the abundant native trees to choose from for your own welcoming bird, butterfly and joy-filled garden.

Suggested websites: <http://www.bringingnaturehome.net/what-to-plant.html>

Cornell Lab Yard Map-Top Five Great Berries: http://content.yardmap.org/learn/great-berries-great-birds/?region=southeast#sthash.YjI1CuLD&st_refDomain=&st_refQuery=

Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center: wildflower.org

Recommended reading:

The Living Landscape by Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy, 2014

Bringing Nature Home by Doug Tallamy, 2007

Sources: Dirr App 2007; Native Trees of the Southeast, Kirkman, Brown, Leopold 2007; Eastern Trees Peterson Field Guides, Petrides, Wehr 1998; Bringing Nature Home, Tallamy 2007; The Living Landscape, Darke, Tallamy 2014; The American Woodland Garden, Darke 2002; Fall Color and Woodland Harvests, Bell, Lindsey 1990

Memphis Arbor Day 2016

Approximately 50 people showed up to help celebrate the official City of Memphis Arbor Day. As one of Tree City USA's requirements, the Memphis Tree Board holds an Arbor Day celebration each year. Tennessee recognizes the first Friday in March as Arbor Day. After the proclamation was read, Jan Castillo shared some thoughts on trees and the group went outside to plant a special Redbud tree that had been donated by The Dabney Nursery. Dabney's chose this particular Cercis species for its unusual color on the new growth.

If you are so inclined, google Cercis Canadensis The Rising Sun™. You may find that you need one of these trees in your landscape as well. This tree can be seen at the Botanic Garden to the right of the path that leads to Sarah's Place, the event room attached to our Live at the Garden stage. Dogwood, Redbud, Tulip Poplar and Shumard Oak seedlings were handed out until supplies ran out.



Pictured are Eldra White, Shawn Posey, Jan Castillo, Scott McCormick, Mark Follis, and Larry Smith



In 2012, the Tennessee Urban Forestry Council designated Memphis Botanic Garden as the first Center of Excellence for Urban Forestry in Tennessee. As a Center of Excellence, the Garden will host educational programs, help with certification of arboretums in the region, and serve as a resource to the community for tree information and education.

The American Conifer Society recognized Memphis Botanic Garden's Conifer Collection as a certified Conifer Reference Garden in 2014.