



Native Plants Provide A Source Of Food For Birds

By: Les Harrison, UF/IFAS Wakulla County
Extension Director

Follow us on...



<http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>

From a bird's perspective it has been a pretty good summer. There was enough rain for plants which thrived and provided ample sources of food.

The lush bounty of greenery produced seed and fruit for those birds which require those commodities in their diets. The insect and small animal populations were plentiful, too. These added to the avian diet selection of certain winged species.

But as October looms the days are getting shorter and the menu options are starting to shrink in the wild. Homeowners who want to retain birds can provide a microenvironment of avian dining options to help these feathered friends overwinter in Wakulla County.

The first action is to establish native plant species whenever possible. Landscaping with plants native to Florida provides more consistent food and cover for native wildlife, including birds, than do non-native selections.

A secondary benefit to the homeowner is they require less care and resources to establish and maintain. As with all plants, newly added native plants must be watered until they are established. Once rooted-in, Florida's native plants require less water because most are adapted to local water conditions.

Native plant species have evolved and adapted to local conditions over thousands of years. They are usually much more tolerant to climatic conditions at a given location. When established, most species require little or no additional irrigation beyond normal rainfall.

Native plants are better adapted to natural soil conditions and generally do not require fertilizing. They are also more resistant to localized pests and diseases thereby minimizing the need for pesticides.

They typically grow more slowly and generating much less yard waste. This is an important feature for both the homeowner and the waste-removal system

Even native plants have specific environmental conditions for optimal growth. This may include the amount of sun exposure, wet or dry soil conditions, soil acidity and density, and salt

tolerance. All of these conditions vary in Wakulla County and should be part of the plant selection process.

It is best to evaluate the setting then purchase the appropriate plants for the conditions in your yard. Attempting to retrofit a radically different environment can be time consuming and expensive, and usually fails.

The next consideration for local bird-friendly yard is water. Water is an essential part of all productive wildlife habitats.

Birds and other wildlife will benefit from any water source, such as a birdbath or a small pond. Additionally ponds attract a variety of amphibians and reptiles species which serve as part of the natural food chain.

To learn more about establishing a bird-friendly landscape, contact your UF/IFAS Wakulla Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>