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**HABITAT** - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

**We want to hear from you!** Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

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## Native Plant Profile...Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*)



The Serviceberry, also known as , is a large shrub or small deciduous tree, growing various heights to 25 feet. Commonly found along woodland edges, swamps, and thickets, Serviceberry grows either in clumps with several stems or in a small tree form. It grows well in sun or shade, but flower and fruit production greater in sun.

**Other Names:** Juneberry, Shadblow, Shadbush

**Flower:** Early blooming , flowering before Flowering Dogwood. Flowers are white, long-March to June.

**Fruit:** Dark purple fruits from June to August are 1/3-inch diameter, apple like, sweet and jellies.

**Landscape Notes:** A favorite since colonial times, the Serviceberry provides beauty color is deep orange to rusty red. Gray bark with distinct dark vertical lines provides be planted as a specimen or in the forest understory, and is particularly striking when evergreen backdrop. Suitable for planting along ponds and woodland edges.

**Serviceberries are cover for:** Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Wood, Hermit and

**Serviceberries are nest trees for:** Eastern Kingbird, American Robin and Wood

Serviceberry provides food for many species of wildlife:



Ruffed Grouse, Mourning Dove, Common Flicker, Hairy, Downy, and Red-headed woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Tufted Titmouse, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood, Hermit and Swainson's Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, American Redstart, Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Cardinal, Red-breasted Grosbeak, Junco, Song Sparrow, Beaver, Red fox, Red Squirrel, White-tailed Deer.



petaled blossoms from  
and can be used in pie

year round. Fall leaf  
winter interest. It can  
planted against an

Swainson's Thrush

Thrush



adult plumage. White spots around the eyes give the appearance of broken eye rings. Wings are gray and the bills are thin and yellow. Males are slightly larger.

## Maryland Wildlife: American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)

An American Robin is not really a robin. It is the largest of the Thrushes found in North America. This bird was named by the early English settlers who thought it looked very similar to the Robin of their homeland, with both birds having red breasts. Our American Robin is a bird that is familiar to most people, as it has adapted to living in man-made environments.

The adult Robin is 8 1/2 " in length and can be as large as 11". The head is black to dark gray in color, with the male's head deep black in the spring mating season. The breast feathers are dull red- orange, with the female having a paler color. Juveniles have white spotted breasts until they molt into the



American Robins are one of the first birds to sing in the dawn and the last at night. Their song of "chirrup, cherry-up, cherry-up " or the loud "chup " is one of the most common wildlife sounds heard in the suburbs. Robins have alarm calls to warn others of predators in the area.

These birds breed generally where lawns and other short grass areas are mixed with shrubs and trees. They will also breed in conifer areas where openings or grassy areas are nearby. Robins will sometimes use a nesting platform and Wildacres has plans on how to build one. The breeding season runs from April to August with the birds being capable of raising three broods a year.

Robins are monogamous with pair bonding taking place in early spring. The female builds the nest, which consists of grass, twigs, and mud in an open cup shape. It is lined with soft material. The nest is located in trees or bushes about 5 to 15 feet off the ground.

**On the average 3 to 4 blue eggs are laid, which are incubated for 12 to 14 days. The young will leave the nest in 14 to 16 days.**



Males will help feed the young, but the female is the only one that sits on the nest. Once the young are on their own they join the males in the nighttime roosts. Once the female finishes raising her last brood, they will join the nighttime roost that can range from 20 to 200 robins. It is thought that nighttime roosts serve as protection from predators.

Robins can also be found in roosts of Grackles and Starlings. These roosts from fall to early spring can move about in a random fashion that is dependent on food sources such as berries. They are capable of landing on a holly tree in late

winter and eating the entire berry crop!

### [Listen to the American Robin](#)

Robins are considered short distant, daytime migrants. You may not see them in your backyard in the fall or winter, but the birds are found at the local bottomland woods and/ or near berry- bearing trees. The birds that you find in the fall and winter in your area probably were raised just a few hundred miles to the north of you. Robins come back into the backyards in early spring, as the soil warms up making insects and worms available as food.

American Robins eat different foods through out the year. In the spring and summer the diet is high in protein with insects and worms consisting of 40% of the birds diet. Robins find earthworms by sight and hearing. It is quite common to see the birds running, stopping, cocking their head to hear their prey then tugging the worm out of the ground. These birds certainly help the farmer by eating ground beetles and weevils. They eat fruit year round, with favorites being cherry, dogwood, grape, red cedar, blackberry, holly, blueberry, elderberry. spicebush and viburnums.

Currently the population of American Robins is stable. Robins live on average about two years. Since these birds eat so many insects and worms in human environments, they can serve as an indicator of chemical pollution.

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## Container Gardening

Containers can be used to grow almost anything. You can certainly experiment with different shapes, sizes and depths of containers to plant species that attract wildlife. You can grow plants in containers year round. Containers with native plants can link your terrace or patio linked to nature.

The pluses of container planting are that you start with good soil and easy access and if you make a mistake. it can be fixed fairly quickly. You get a chance to experiment and try different plants and control the right exposure to the sun and planting conditions such as moisture and pH.



### Some things to consider when planting containers should help your success...

- Check your containers daily to see if they need water. Container plant roots cannot reach the ground's subsurface water. In vary hot weather; check small containers at least 2 times a day. Also be aware that clay and terra cotta pots dry out quicker than wood or plastic ones.
- Do not put container plants in full mid-day sun. Containers heat up quicker than the soil. If you move containers to the shade, think about placing them next to a wall that can reflect light, so they can get the benefits of indirect sunlight.
- Fertilize the plants. Container plant roots cannot reach the nutrients of a ground soil. Try a water-soluble fertilizer every 2-4 weeks.
- Make sure you have good drainage. Have holes in the bottom of your containers for this purpose. If not possible, place 1 to 2 inches of gravel at the bottom of the container to help.
- When a plant begins to fade or stops blooming, find another to replace it. This way you can have vigorous plants from spring to frost. You can control your amount of bloom.



### Ideas for what to plant to attract wildlife each season...

**Spring:** Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Ferns



**Summer:** Larkspurs, Nasturtiums, Petunias and Water Gardens using Native Aquatics such as native sedges, rushes and reeds. Make sure you are not using any non-native aquatic that might escape and harm the native plants of your nearby streams and ponds.

**Fall:** Native Asters, Pyracanthas

**Winter:** Junipers. When planting trees or shrubs in containers, plant them in frost safe ones such as those made of cement or stone.

**For additional information:** Contact your local native plant society to see what success they are having with container gardening.

## Planting that Sun-baked Hillside

A sunny hillside near a residence usually means you are dealing with CLAY. Take a shovel and dig under the surface. If you are the owner of a yard full of hard pan clay, with little topsoil, don't dismay. The solution to planting this tough place is to amend the existing soil with compost to improve drainage.

Depending on the slope, terracing the hillside will give you more planting space and the opportunity to construct raised beds on the terraces: and the addition of an arbor can reduce the sun's rays.

If you would like a simpler solution, and your hillside is not too steep, try planting a native meadow. If you can connect your meadow with an existing shrub border or flowerbed, do so. A continuous stretch of habitat is more appealing to birds than isolated island beds, where there is nowhere to flee from predators.



Here are some tried and true plants for clay soils in full sun.

**False indigo (*Baptisia australis*)** grows naturally in sun-baked clay soils from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. It has a deep taproot, which allows it to grow under such tough conditions. The leaves emerge in spring and are followed by spikes of pea like blue flowers in May.

Give this plant water and compost during the first two years and you will be rewarded with a plant that can reach five feet and tolerate drought.

This plant should be placed in the back of any border you are creating, where its blue –green foliage makes any oranges, reds and yellows of your plantings jump out with color. The black seedpods and stems add interest to the garden in winter.



Another clay-tolerant meadow plant with a sturdy taproot is the **Butterfly flower (*Asclepias tuberosa*)**. As with false indigo this plant takes a year or two to establish itself, so start off with a sturdy plant. Butterfly flower forms two-foot clumps of bright orange flowers in July. Use it as an accent plant. Mature plants are rounded with tough stiff stems.



**Coneflowers (*Echinacea*)** will withstand blistering heat, and will reseed in a reliable way. They provide goldfinches with months of food in the form of seeds from their flower heads. If you want goldfinches, plant them. Wildacres would like to thank Marie Erb for her original work on this subject.

For more information on composting and meadows check out the articles on these subjects on the Wildacres site [www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp)

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