

Wild Acres - Habichat

For stewards of Maryland's backyard wildlife

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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.

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

Fresh Garden Seeds for Birds

When you are scooping out your cantaloupe or cutting up a cucumber, don't throw the seeds away. Save the seeds to make bird treats. Nuthatches, chickadees, cardinals and blue jays enjoy seeds of squashes, watermelons, pumpkins and other melons.



Cucumber and sweet pepper seeds are also good to save. Seeds from hot peppers are not really liked by squirrels, but songbirds don't seem to mind them.



Prepare the seeds the following way. When you are scooping out the seeds, rinse them to remove pulp. You can place the seeds onto a tray to offer fresh to the birds or you can dry them for storage for later use. If you decide to dry seeds try the following. Spread the seeds in a single layer on several sheets of newspaper in a dry sunny spot. The seeds should dry in a couple of days. Mix the seeds together, keep in a jar or bag, sealed and in a cool dry place until ready to use.

Native Plant Profile.....

Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)



Highbush blueberry is one of the most important plants in the blueberry family. Found growing on moist, well-drained, slightly acid soils around wetlands, in woodland clearings and open meadows, it grows 6 to 15 feet tall in sun or partial shade.



Flowers/Fruits: Small, pink bells on drooping racemes in May and June. Sweet edible blue fruits June to September.

Landscape Notes: Highly ornamental in all seasons with especially brilliant bronze and crimson fall foliage. Responds well to pruning. Thick bushy growth is ideal for planting in clumps, in borders or along hedgerows. Produces fruit 8 to 10 years on average. Fruit yield dependent on honeybee pollination.

Other Blueberries: Lowbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) grows to 8 inches. There are 35 species of blueberry native to North America and all are important wildlife food. Blueberries are important to American wildlife. There are about 57 species of wildlife that eat it as part of their main diet.

Blueberries are important to American wildlife: There are about 57 species of wildlife that eat it as part of their main diet. Some of these species are: Canada Goose, Turkey, one of the most essential summer and early fall foods for Ruffed Grouse. Other users are Bobwhite, Mourning Dove, Ruby-throated Hummingbird uses the nectar, Common Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Crows, Tufted Titmouse, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-breasted Chat, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, especially important to Scarlet Tanager. Cardinals, Pine Grosbeak, Rufous-sided Towhee, Tree Sparrow, Pheasants, and White-throated Sparrows are the other songbirds that eat the juicy, sweet berries. As for mammals, it is an essential food for black bears. Other mammals that use the fruit are red fox, gray fox, opossum, rabbits, raccoons, skunks and deer.

Blueberries are cover for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite, Ringnecked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, Wood Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Rufous-Sided Towhee, Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Because of their dense shrubby growth, blueberries are worthy to plant in hedgerows for these species. Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Wood, Hermit and Swainson's Thrush.

Blueberries are nesting places for: Gray Catbird

Blueberries are host plants for: Butterflies such as the Brown Elfin, Pink-edged Sulphur and Spring Azure. The Brown Elfins will also use the flower nectar.

Best Blueberries: The University of Maryland recommends the following Highbush Blueberry varieties for growing in Maryland: Bluecrop, Bluetta and Blueray. These varieties will do well throughout the area. The best growth and fruit production occurs in acid soils of pH 5.0 with plenty of moisture and organic matter.

Suburban Deer Management

Repellants Can Provide an Effective Deterrent

Introduction

Deer are beautiful creatures that inhabit a diverse range of habitats in Maryland, including the suburban landscape. Beautiful as they are, deer are increasingly becoming viewed by suburbanites as destructive pests, rather than graceful distractions, because of their feeding habits. Suburban deer continue to increase in numbers and cause growing problems with humans sharing their habitat - no pun intended. They frequently dine on gardens and landscape plantings at the dismay and expense of an increasing number of suburban residents. Complaints to DNR staff have steadily increased over time, and indicate a decreased tolerance of deer in many areas of Maryland. The following article provides a workable solution to the issue of suburban deer damage.

Deer thrive and find abundant food in suburban areas. When wooded areas become housing developments, some sections are cleared for roads and home sites, while others remain forested; new homeowners then plant ornamental shrubs and seed the yard. When open farmland is developed, new residents plant trees in addition to shrubs and seeded lawns. Both of these types of development actually improve habitat for deer. At the same time, hunting within the forested or agricultural landscapes is either eliminated or restricted, affording deer both improved habitat with reduced mortality, resulting in elevated deer populations. Superior plants contain added nutrients, which provide excellent food for Maryland's deer herd. Consumption of highly nutritious crops contributes to improved deer productivity. Fertilized lawns, garden plants and many varieties of landscape plants are often more nutritious than native forage, and therefore more appealing to deer, which is why deer often target landscape plants and gardens in the suburbs.

Repellents can provide an effective deterrent when applied to gardens and ornamental shrubs in a regular manner. They are effective when used in small areas, and areas with low to moderate deer numbers, but are most effective where untreated plants are available for deer to eat.

Repellents: How They Work

Repellents work by emitting an alarming odor or bad taste that repels deer, and discourages their feeding behavior. They make treated plants less palatable and less desirable to deer, and have been used successfully to reduce damage to ornamental plants, vegetable gardens, orchards, and tree and landscape nurseries. They do not alter the aesthetics of plantings, and can be used where aesthetics cannot be compromised. Repellents should not be expected to eliminate all damage, but they can help to reduce deer feeding damage to plantings.

Some repellents are applied directly to plants (contact repellents) and some are placed near plants that need protection (area repellents). Repellents should only be applied according to label directions, to prevent damage to tender plantings.

Most repellents can be placed into two categories, taste-based repellents and odor-based repellents, though a few repellents incorporate some of both qualities.

Repellents: Taste-Based Repellents

Taste-based repellents impart a noxious taste that makes treated plants less palatable than untreated plants. Most taste-based repellents are applied directly to each individual plant and discourage deer from feeding because of the offensive taste that they impart to the plant. One kind of taste-based repellent is systemic. It is placed in the ground with the plant roots, and is absorbed by the plant as it grows. The chemicals absorbed by the plant impart a noxious taste to the plant, which deters deer feeding. A drawback of taste-based repellents is that deer must eat part of the plant before being repelled.

Certain taste-based repellents can be used on edible plants such as vegetable crops, fruits, berries, nuts and herbs, but they must be removed (washed off) prior to eating. The following repellents are approved for use on edible plants: Hinder*, Millers' Hot Sauce *, Deer Stopper*, Plant Pro-Tec*, and Deer buster deer and & rabbit repellent*. Only those repellents that are labeled for use on edible plants should be used for edible plants.



Prevent Bird Seed from Spoiling in Summer

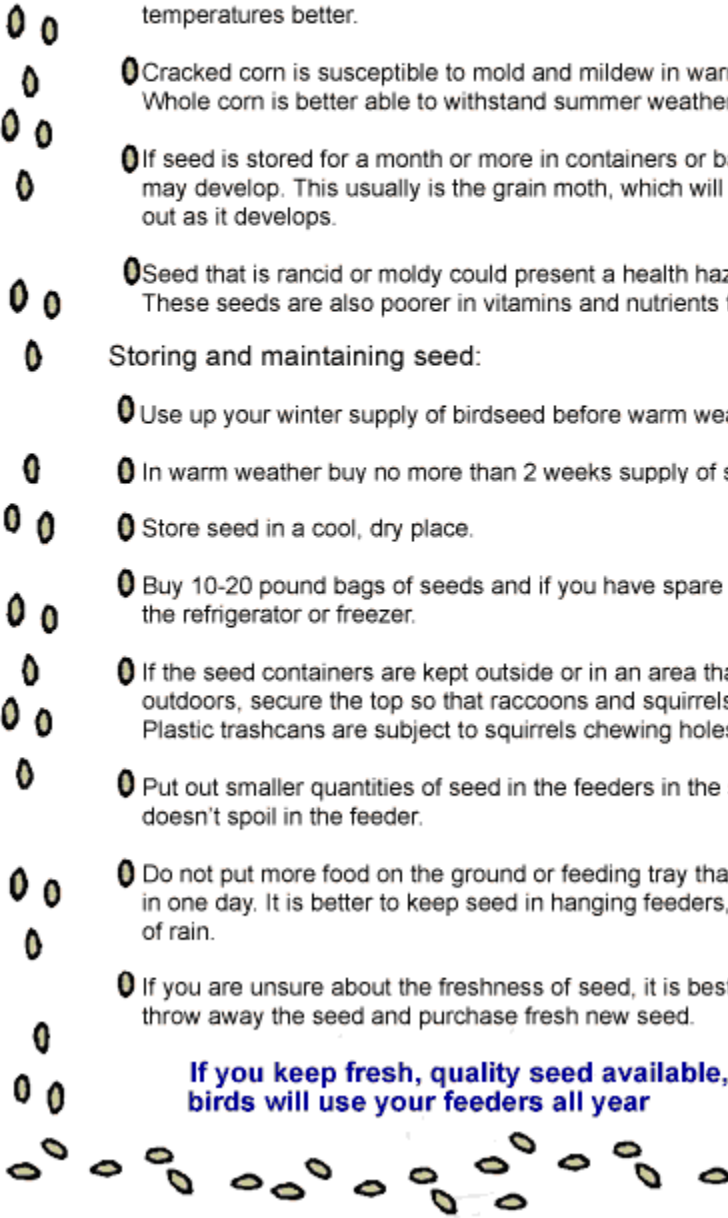
Warm weather can cause birdseed to deteriorate or spoil. Take the following precautions to have healthy nutritious seed during the hot summer months.

- Hot weather causes seed with a high oil content to become rancid; Safflower and sunflower have insulating hulls so they can stand warm temperatures better.
- Cracked corn is susceptible to mold and mildew in warm humid weather. Whole corn is better able to withstand summer weather,
- If seed is stored for a month or more in containers or bags, insect larvae may develop. This usually is the grain moth, which will eat the seed inside out as it develops.
- Seed that is rancid or moldy could present a health hazard to birds. These seeds are also poorer in vitamins and nutrients than fresh seed.

Storing and maintaining seed:

- Use up your winter supply of birdseed before warm weather.
- In warm weather buy no more than 2 weeks supply of seed at a time.
- Store seed in a cool, dry place.
- Buy 10-20 pound bags of seeds and if you have spare seed, store in the refrigerator or freezer.
- If the seed containers are kept outside or in an area that is open to the outdoors, secure the top so that raccoons and squirrels cannot get in. Plastic trashcans are subject to squirrels chewing holes in them.
- Put out smaller quantities of seed in the feeders in the summer so seed doesn't spoil in the feeder.
- Do not put more food on the ground or feeding tray than birds can consume in one day. It is better to keep seed in hanging feeders, especially in times of rain.
- If you are unsure about the freshness of seed, it is best to throw away the seed and purchase fresh new seed.

**If you keep fresh, quality seed available,
birds will use your feeders all year**



Birds- Essential Bug Controllers

Birds are seldom given credit for their help in controlling garden pests. Increase your bird population and you will reduce the pest population. Adult songbirds that eat seeds must feed their growing young protein and that comes in the form of fresh insects.

Some of the best pest controllers are the house wren, Baltimore oriole, and chickadees. Blue jays and black birds eat cut –worms. Robins like Colorado potato beetles, cutworms, leafminers, loopers, and slugs.

Wrens will include in their diet cutworms and leafhoppers. Warblers will eat aphids, cucumber beetles and flea beetles. Chickadees will gobble up aphids, cucumber beetles, flea beetles and leaf miners. Even the invasive pests, starlings and English sparrows, consume thousands of pest insects, such as cabbage loopers, cucumber beetles, cutworms and leafhoppers. Yellow –shafted flickers love to eat ants.

With this information in mind, it is easy to see why it is important to provide bird habitat if you want a healthy garden and landscape.

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- Photo of Highbush Blueberry courtesy of Robert H. Mohlenbrock @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database/**USDA SCS. 1991. *Southern wetland flora: Field office guide to plant species.* South National Technical Center, Fort Worth, TX.**
- Illustration of Highbush Blueberry courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / **Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. *Illustrated flora of the northern states and Canada.* Vol. 2: 700.**

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

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Wild Acres Program

Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service

Attn: Marilyn Mause

Gwynnbrook WMA

3740 Gwynnbrook Ave

Owings Mills MD 21117

410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

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**For additional information about the Wild Acres Program
and for back issues of HABICHAT, Visit us on the DNR Website.**

<http://ww.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/wildacres.asp>

