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Native Plant Profile... Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)

Common names: Northern Bayberry, Waxmyrtle, Tallow Shrub, Candleberry, Waxberry

Similar Species: Common Waxmyrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) Note this plant is evergreen, and has wedge shaped leaves. Dwarf Waxmyrtle (*Myrica pusilla*), - Smaller leaves and spreads by underground runners

Family: Waxmyrtle Family



General Description: Semi-evergreen shrub, with short-stalked leaves. Twigs have tiny yellow resin dots that can be seen with a magnification glass. Plants are dioceious, so if you are establishing this plant make sure to have at least one male plant to ensure berry production. Plant is upright and multi-stemmed with an average height of 6 to 10 feet. Spreads by suckers once established.

Diameter: Multi-stemmed trunks can spread up to 6"

Twigs: Hairy and gray

Leaves: Thin, pointed, 1" to 5". When crushed they emit a scent.

Buds: White

Bloom: May to July; Common Waxmyrtle blooms April to June .

Fruit: Small, dark gray, hairy, wax-covered nuts form in June and are ripe by October. Fruit stays on the plant until spring.

Soil: Does best in a light, dry, unfertilized soil. In the wild it is found on poor soils near the coast.

Sun: Full to light shade

Importance to Wildlife: Many species of songbirds eat the fruit and seed in small amounts. The Yellow-Rumped Warbler was once called the "Myrtle warbler" as it consumes the berries on a regular basis. Tree Swallows will eat the berries even though the rest of their diet are insects.

Other wildlife that eats the fruit: Bobwhite Quail, Wild Turkey, Bluebirds, Catbirds, Chickadees, Crows, Meadowlarks, Mockingbirds, Brown Thrashers, Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Wrens, and Gray Fox. White-tailed deer will eat twigs and foliage.

Landscaping Notes:

- Excellent for windbreaks, hedges.
- Good plant to choose to help control soil erosion.
- This plant has root nodules which enrich the soil through nitrogen fixing bacteria.
- Is intolerant of other vegetation.
- Need to keep it from overspreading by trimming it back every three to five years.
- Pruning helps in promoting berry production.
- Commercial Cultivars of Bayberry: "Myda"- a good berry producer; "Morton"- Good fruit producer and smaller in height (5 ').

Did You Know?

- The wax from the berry is used to make scented candles.
- One pound of bayberry wax is produced from 15 pounds of berry.
- Because of the labor intensive work required to produce this wax, the candles were only burned on holidays.
- Produces a sweet clean burning wax.
- Common Waxmyrtle is often the preferred plant for this.
- Branches of the plant have also been cut for winter decorations.

**DO NOT EAT THE FRUIT.
IT IS TOXIC TO HUMANS!**



Maryland Wildlife: American Goldfinch
(Carduelis tristis)

Common Names: Goldfinch, Eastern Goldfinch, Wild Canary, Thistle bird

General Description: A small songbird approximately 5" in size. The male in the summer time has the bright canary yellow body with black wings, forehead and tail. Female birds in the summer are a dull olive color, with black wings and noticeable wing bars. Both

sexes have short conical bills. Winter: Both sexes look like the summer female but with more a grayish tint. Legs are light brown. Immature birds are a pale yellow prior to their first molt.

Song: Canary like. When the bird fly it's unique up and down flight it often sings t—dee-di-di.

Range: Found year round in Maryland Found from Canada to Mexico.

Status: Common songbird.

Reproduction:

- One of the last birds to breed in the summer from late July to September.
- Goldfinches usually only produce one brood per season of four to six eggs.
- The female builds the nest, and incubates the eggs by herself.
- Eggs hatch in about 13 to 14 days, with the young staying in the nest another 14 days.
- The male does help raise the young.
- Nests are built in trees or shrubs 15 to 40 feet above the ground the average being 15 to 17 feet.
- These birds will not use old nests and will not use nesting boxes or platforms.
- Nests are often lined with thistle down.
- The timing of breeding is based upon the availability of thistle down.





Migration: Local, travels in flocks

Habitat: Breeding habitat is old fields, woods edge, shrubs along ponds and streams and hedgerows. Winter – Birds become very wide spread, weedy fields, hedgerows, and deciduous woods. Summer time found in patches of thistles, dandelions on lawns, weedy gardens and roadsides.

Food: Primarily seed eaters. Will also eat aphids and caterpillars in the summer. Prefer the seeds of

Ragweed, Thistles, Sweet gum, Sunflower, Dandelion, Alder, Goldenrod, Coneflower, Maples, Timothy Grass, Yellow Poplar, and Pine.

Did you Know:

- Goldfinches are very attracted to bird feeders filled with Niger (Thistle) seeds.
- The American Goldfinch is the official county bird of Howard County, Maryland.
- Goldfinches hull the seeds they are eating and will cut off any flowering plumes and other non-nutritious plant parts.
- These birds present a cheerful, social image when seen in flocks or flying through a backyard.

Tracking Wildlife with Children



Tracking is a wonderful way to help your children become nature detectives.

Who lives in the backyard?

Who lives next to the trail in the woods?

Who is chewing that log by the pond?

Who chewed off the stems of the hedge?

Can they solve the mystery?

Tracking has been part of human culture since ancient times. Many animals track by sight, and smell.

Humans track by sight and use the ability to reason to figure out what kind of animal left signs.

Tracking does not have to be just in the snow or mud, but can also include looking for signs before a frost melts or the morning dew dries.



There are many wonderful field guides available from the library, bookstore, and your local nature center or online to help with identifying what you are looking at. Make sure you use the field guide that is appropriate for the area you live in. For example a field guide for animal tracks in the Mid-Atlantic States is suitable to use in Maryland. If a field guide covers the entire U.S., make sure you are reading about the part of the U.S. where you live or are visiting.



Look at domestic animal tracks as well as wild animal tracks.

Compare domestic dogs' tracks to a picture of a wolf's tracks. Ask how are they the same? How are they different?

Find some house cat tracks outside. Compare them to a fox track.

Notice how a track in fresh snow changes over time as the track freezes and thaws. Does the track get bigger?

Scat: Animal droppings are shown in field guides. See if you can find deer droppings. How are rabbit droppings different from those of the deer?

Gnawed or chewed woody plants: Look for shrub and tree stems that have been chewed by animals. See if you can find tracks or scat by the plant. Does this help solve the question of who is eating the plant?



Nests: In the winter take a count of how many old nests in trees or shrubs you can see in the backyard or nearby woods. Who made them?

For additional outside winter activities with the children you might enjoy reading: [Enjoying Nature in Winter with Your Children](#) in our 2008 Winter issue.

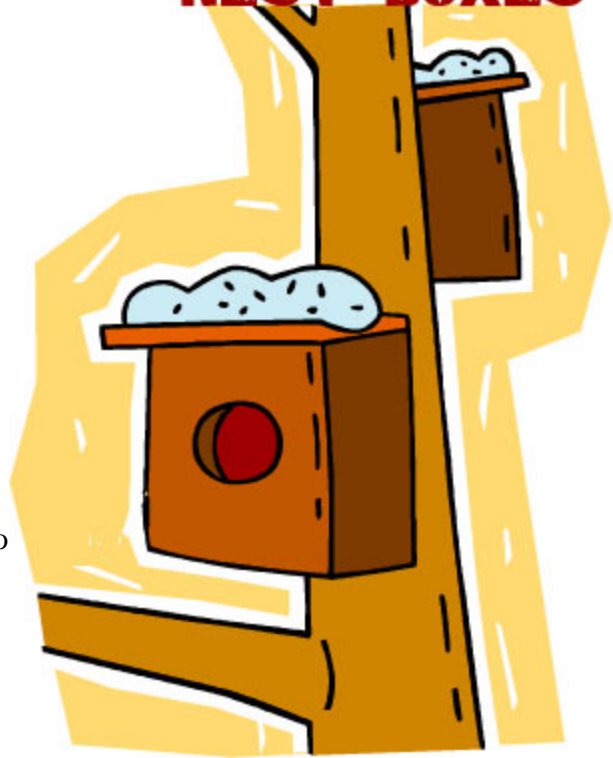
TIME TO MAINTAIN NEST BOXES

Spring will soon arrive and now is the time to maintain nest boxes for songbirds to have a suitable site to raise their young if no natural cavities exist.

Make sure the nest boxes you have can be cleaned out easily. Ideally the boxes should have hinges and latches to allow people not predators to open the box.

Most nest boxes should be placed to face towards the south to allow for the sun to warm the box from the cool night. If you place the entrance to have a western or northern exposure this will often have wind and rain blowing into the nest.

If you find your nest box only needs a cleaning do not take the box down. Nest boxes in the winter will often be used as a roosting box by Bluebirds, Nuthatches, and Chickadees. You may even wish to place a roost box up in the winter for these birds. There are many internet sources that have information on how to make or buy a roost box.



DO NOT attach a perch outside the nest box entrance hole. It may look attractive to you but native songbirds do not need the perch. Perches attract non-native birds such as Starlings, and English, (House) Sparrows, both species of birds that will out compete the native birds you are trying to attract.

Make sure you clean out the old nest in the box. Leaving the old nest in the box will attract mice and songbirds will not reuse an old nest.

Repair a loose roof, rotting bottom, cracked or split sides of a box.

Painting a nest box is a topic with many opinions. You may use untreated wood for your nest box, but realize it will not last as long as a painted box. If you paint DO NOT use lead based paint or creosote which can be toxic to songbirds. Use natural colors, such as brown, tan or gray. Songbirds want their nest to be in a natural looking area.

When you repair or install a new box use wood that is native to the area. Try to use wood that is from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). www.sfiprogram.org

Not all songbirds use nest boxes. Do some research to determine which birds in your habitat will use nest box. Make sure you have the right size entrance hole. If the hole is too large it attracts non-native birds and makes it easier for predators to take the eggs and young.

If your existing nest box does not seem to be attracting the species of bird it was designed for, make sure it is placed at the proper height, has a predator guard if on a post, and is away from an area that has a lot of human or pet activity. The existing site may not be the right site, so now is the time to place it in a more appropriate site.

In most of Maryland, you should have your nest boxes for songbirds repaired and placed by the middle of February. If you are in another state check with your local bird clubs and your states wildlife agencies web site for the best time to have songbird nest boxes in place.

With these suggestions, you should have successful nest boxes.

Acknowledgements:

- Photo Collage of Bayberry, courtesy of Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation
 - Photograph of Bayberry with fruit, courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service
 - Female American gold finch, I-Stock image
 - Male American Gold Finch in full plumage, I-Stock image
 - Male American Gold Finch in full plumage, I-Stock image
 - Chart illustrating a variety of animal tracks, I-Stock image
 - Photograph of rabbit tracks in the snow, I-Stock image
 - Photograph of beaver tracks, I-Stock image
 - Photograph of women and children walking along a snow-covered trail, I-Stock image
 - Illustration of snow-covered nest boxes courtesy of MD Dept. of Natural Resources and Microsoft Images
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If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.

<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

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

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

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 For their Home and Garden Information website, visit <http://extension.umd.edu/learn/ask-gardening>.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

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 Patty Allen at 410-260-8537, or send e-mail to: pallen@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

For Additional Information, Contact:

Wild Acres Program

Rock Creek Camp

Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service

410-482/759

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

Habichat, the newsletter for Maryland's Stewards of Backyard Wildlife, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

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