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HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - IS THE KEY.

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Welcome to the Winter Issue of Habi-Chat! Backyards may seem barren this time of year, but they are actually teeming with winter wildlife! In this issue, learn about the benefits of eastern redcedar, the neat life of Maryland's largest woodpeckers, tips for providing winter water, and how to make a bird seed wreath.

If there is a particular topic that you would like to see on our site, then please don't hesitate to contact me to let me know! My information can be found at the bottom of this newsletter. Happy New Year!

Check out the Maryland Native Plant Society website for Native Plant Sales near you!
(<http://www.mdflora.org/plantsales.html>)



Maryland Native Plant Profile:

Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)

Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is a popular hedgerow plant that is also excellent for wildlife. This tree can grow up to 50 feet in height and can tolerate a range of soils from dry to wet. Eastern redcedar is in the cedar family (Cupressaceae) and can be found growing naturally throughout much of Maryland except within Garrett County. Eastern redcedar thrives in full sun but can tolerate partial shade.

Eastern redcedar is an evergreen with scaly leaves. Eastern redcedars are dioecious—meaning they have both male and female plants. Typically, it takes redcedars up to 10 years to become sexually mature. Males and females produce small cones. Female cones resemble berries with greenish to bluish scales. Bluish colored berries are the most ripe.

Eastern redcedar is important for wildlife due to a number of reasons. The dense, evergreen foliage provides ideal nesting and roosting cover as well as protection from snow and predators. The fruits have high fat and fiber content, making the fruits an ideal winter forage. Cedar waxwings, northern bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, rabbits, opossums, and others enjoy the cedar berries.



Eastern redcedar (left) by [Nicholas Tonelli, Flickr CC](#)
Cedar waxwing in eastern redcedar (right) by [Janet and Phil, Flickr CC](#)

Eastern redcedar is great for protecting soils, for providing shade, and for providing privacy. Unfortunately, eastern redcedar is susceptible to bagworms (*Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis*). For more information on bagworms and ways to deal with infestations, please check out the University of Maryland Extension Service page here: <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/bagworms-trees-and-shrubs>



*Evergreen bagworms (left) by Delaware Cooperative Extension
Female redcedar cones (right) by [Camelia TMU](#), Flickr CC*

Want more Habi-chats? Check out our archives here:
http://dnr2.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/habitat/habichat_archives.aspx

Maryland Native Wildlife

Pileated Woodpecker (*Hylatomus pileatus*)

Pileated woodpeckers are striking birds. They are Maryland's largest woodpecker species as well as an important habitat architect. Their characteristic rectangular excavations create valuable shelter and nest sites for many other species.

Pileated woodpeckers are about the size of a crow. Both sexes have a noticeable red crest with a black body. The face and neck have white stripes. Males have a red "mustache" on their cheeks while females do not.



Male pileated woodpecker by Robin Horn, Flickr CC

Mature forests are favorite habitat sites for pileated woodpeckers. However, they also can be found in backyards, parks, and woodlots. At the turn of the century, pileated woodpeckers were quite rare due to habitat loss, but the population has since rebounded. Pileated woodpeckers can be found throughout the eastern United States and southern Canada. They are year-round residents of all Maryland counties.

Interestingly enough, carpenter ants are the main delicacy for pileated woodpeckers. Their diets can be anywhere from 40-97% ants! Sometimes, pileated woodpecker ant excavations are so deep that the woodpeckers can break small trees in half! Other forages include wood boring beetle larvae, termites, flies, caterpillars, fruits, and nuts.

Courting pileated woodpeckers will show off their crests and white wing patches as well as perform display flights. Once paired, the male will excavate the nest cavity in a dead tree with assistance from the female. Unlike most other woodpecker holes which

are usually round, pileated woodpeckers will often create oblong or rectangular nest cavities. The nests are lined with leftover woodchips. Once esconsed in the cavity, the female will lay 3-5 eggs which incubate and hatch within 2-3 weeks. The young stay with their parents for up to 28 days. Nests can be reused in later years.

Dead or dying trees (snags) are the main attractants for pileated woodpeckers. Occasionally, during the winter, pileated woodpeckers will visit feeders- particularly those that offer suet.



Pileated woodpecker nest by Lyle Madeson, USDA, Flickr CC

Winter HabiChat Tips

Check out previous Winter HabiChat articles for more ideas on Winter wildlife gardening.

1. [Dead Trees are the Bees Knees](#)
2. [Habitat Tips for Winter Wildlife](#)
3. [Make Your Own Suet](#)
4. [Pruning in Winter](#)
5. [Winter Berries for Wildlife](#)



Habitat Tips: Water in Winter

Surprisingly enough, water is often more limiting than food in the winter. To create a winter wildlife friendly landscape, you should include winter water sources. A heated bird bath or pet bowl can serve as a water source if no natural ones exist in your landscape.



Mourning doves enjoying a heated bird bath by Linda (akahodag), Flickr CC

Tips:

- Choose a dark-colored bowl which absorbs the maximum amount of sunlight and place in full sun.
- Read and follow all instructions for use.
- Place bath out when temperatures dip below freezing.
- Check basin frequently and refill when necessary. A heated bath or bowl that runs without water can wear out quickly and/or malfunction.
- Add a few large stones as perches.
- Clean every 2 weeks (very important!!). Disinfect with a mild vinegar solution and follow cleaning guidelines on product.
- Use with outdoor electrical cords and cover connections with electrical tape to

prevent moisture from seeping in.

- Clear off deep snow.
- Avoid using salt, antifreeze, or other chemicals that can be hazardous to birds and/or can corrode your bath.



Female northern cardinal enjoying a drink by [wplynn, Flickr CC](#)

Clean Those Nest Boxes!

Winter is the best time of year to clean out nest boxes. Here are some tips on what to do:

- Always wear gloves and consider using a face mask
- Remove old nests or leftover materials; discard or place in area away from nest to decay (sometimes parasite eggs/larvae can be found in nesting material and placement close to boxes encourages recolonization of your box!)
- Use a stiff brush to brush out the interior and sides of box
- Use bird-safe disinfectant or mix a solution of one part vinegar to two parts water to clean out interior; allow interior to dry thoroughly



Backyard Wildlife Fun for Kids: Bird Seed Wreaths

Looking for a family-friendly craft that helps wildlife? If so, then consider making bird seed wreaths and/or ornaments to decorate your backyard! The recipe below is adopted from Today's Homeowner. The original post can be found here:

<http://www.todayshomeowner.com/how-to-make-a-bird-seed-wreath/>



Ingredients:

- $\frac{3}{4}$ c flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c warm water
- 3 tblsp light corn syrup
- 1 package of unflavored gelatin
- 4 c quality bird seed

Directions:

1. Mix gelatin in warm water until it dissolves. Be sure that it is lump free.
2. Whisk in corn syrup and flour until a paste-like mixture forms.
3. Mix bird seed with paste.
 - a. If creating a wreath, press $\frac{1}{2}$ of mixture in a greased bundt pan or a mold. Press firmly. Add a loop of twine with a piece extending from the mold for hanging. Add rest of mixture and press firmly.
 - b. If creating ornaments, grease a muffin tin or other mold. Firmly press seeds into wells, then take a pencil or a dowel rod to poke holes through the top of the mixture.
4. Place molds in a warm, dry place for 6-8 hours to harden. The mix will begin to whiten as it dries.

5. Carefully remove mix from mold and flip upside-down on a flat surface to allow the underside to dry. Wait another 6-8 hours until completely dry. *Note: Wreaths that are not fully cured will mold quickly.*
6. Use biodegradable string or twine to decorate and hang outside.

Tips:

- Don't place wreath outside when temperatures are above 50 degrees F.
- Don't place wreath out in rain.
- Instead of making a paste, use only bird seed, water, and gelatin. The mix will be crumbly and will take a little longer to dry. Pour excess gelatin into molds.

Acknowledgements

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- Female northern cardinal by wplynn, Flickr Creative Commons
- All other photos by Kerry Wixted

We want to hear from you!

Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings, etc!

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