

Native plants bring all the birds to the yard

Landscaping is a source of pride for landowners.

Beautiful trees, plants and flowers with bursts of vivid colour are only part of the story. The other part is the long list of welcomed visitors. Vibrant songbirds, migrating butterflies and busy bumblebees bring life and excitement to any garden. Native plants are proven to attract more welcomed wildlife, creating a garden that's truly buzzing.

Ontario's local wildlife is perfectly adapted to Ontario's native plant species. For example, ruby-throated hummingbirds will eat nectar from cardinal flowers while pollinating them at the same time. When the cedar waxwing, a very beautiful bird, eats the berries from a red cedar, the germination rate is three times higher than if they didn't pass through a bird at all. Turtlehead flower nectar contains a 'medicine' for bees to reduce intestinal parasites. So while bees are busy eating, they are healing themselves and pollinating flowers. These examples of plant-animal symbiosis result from millennia of native plants and native wildlife evolving together in the same ecosystems.

'Landowners don't need to resort to exotic foreign plants and flowers,' observed Karen Bannister, a landscape architect with Credit Valley Conservation (CVC). 'Native trees, shrubs and flowers can create beautiful landscapes that also provide valuable wildlife habitat.'

Another benefit of native plants that all gardeners will appreciate is their lower maintenance requirements. Native plants are well adapted to local soil, water, light and heat conditions. These plants have survived on their own in southern Ontario for thousands of years. That means less time micromanaging your garden and more time enjoying it.

'Native plants attract a lot of attention from corporations and institutions looking to lower their annual maintenance costs,' Bannister said.

Planting native plants is easy. CVC has developed four comprehensive booklets to help homeowners, corporations, municipalities and the landscape industry select the right native trees, plants and flowers for their specific site conditions. The booklets feature detailed information on 238 plants that are native to Southern Ontario. They are great for beginners or expert gardeners alike. Two of the booklets focus on trees, shrubs and plants that create bird habitat.

Creating habitat for local wildlife is more important than ever. Loss of habitat has been linked to decreases in certain bird and bee populations. Front yard and backyard landscaping is an opportunity to reverse the trend and help resuscitate these ailing species.

'Our cities and towns are here to stay,' Bannister said. 'Nature has the remarkable ability to adapt. Incorporating native plants into our gardens will make a difference.'

CVC's native plant booklets are available for free as a digital download. Hardcopies can be purchased at

<https://store.creditvalleyca.ca/gardening/>