

# Gardening for Desert Songbirds

## Basic Needs for Desert Songbirds

**Food** • Birds consume a combination of seeds, berries, fruits, and insects. However, putting out birdseed can be harmful, because when many birds congregate together the risk of spreading diseases is magnified.

A better alternative is to plant a mixture of native trees, shrubs, groundcovers, perennials, grasses, and vines. Native plants that have co-evolved with native birds are more likely to provide nutrition for the birds when needed.

**Shelter** • Birds need a safe refuge from predators and bad weather, and suitable nesting sites. Native trees and shrubs with rigid, forked branches and dense foliage provide ideal cover. Thorns to deter predators are an added bonus!

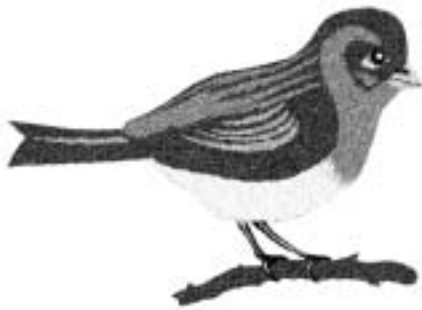
**Water** • Birds need fresh water for drinking and bathing. Stagnant, dirty water can spread diseases, so a recirculating fountain is essential. The sound of moving water also attracts birds to the garden. Be sure that the basin is shallow enough for smaller birds to use safely.



# Design Tips for Songbird Gardens



Cactus Wren



Finch

**Mimic nature in species selection and arrangement.**  
Plants should be arranged in layers to mimic natural patterns

**Create both variety and same-species clumps in the garden.**

Different birds require different food in different seasons. Therefore, there must be enough variety in the garden to sustain birds year-round. Also, maintain some masses of high fruit-producing species to provide very visible, massed displays for easy recognition.

**Leave nature alone!**

Plant litter, old branches and tree snags provide perches, nesting cavities, and insects for food. Unraked areas contribute litter that harbors food for ground-feeding birds. The litter also attracts insects for birds to feed on. Leave areas of bare dirt so that birds can take dust baths. Instead of pruning off spent flowers, leave them alone and allow seed to mature. Avoid using any pesticides.

**Avoid the use of exotic plants.**

Many exotic plants have the potential to spread into native habitats. Since there are so many native plants that provide ideal food and shelter for birds, it makes sense to use them. Turf areas provide little habitat or food for birds, and the herbicides and fertilizers often used on lawns can be toxic.

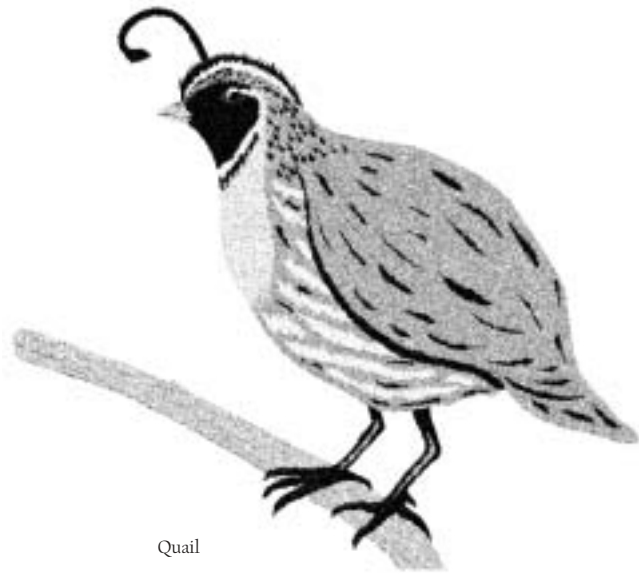
Most of this information was generously supplied by Dr. Margaret Livingston, Landscape Architecture Department, University of Arizona.

Two other booklets that are a great sources of information:

*Landscaping for Desert Wildlife*, Carolyn Engel-Wilson, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 1992.

*Desert Bird Gardening*, published by the Arizona Native Plant Society and the Tucson Audubon Society, 1997.

PLANT	COMMON NAME	PLANT TYPE	USE
<i>Acacia greggii</i>	Catclaw acacia	tree, shrub	food, shelter
<i>Acacia constricta</i>	Whitethorn acacia	tree, shrub	food, shelter
<i>Atriplex canescens</i>	Four wing saltbush	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Atriplex lentiformis</i>	Quailbush	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Atriplex polycarpa</i>	Desert saltbush	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Baileya multiradiata</i>	Desert marigold	perennial	food, shelter
<i>Bouteloua species</i>	Gramma grasses	grass	food
<i>Carnegiea gigantea</i>	Saguaro	cactus	food, shelter
<i>Cassia lindheimeriana</i>	Lindheimer senna	shrub	food
<i>Celtis pallida</i>	Desert hackberry	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Celtis reticulata</i>	Canyon hackberry	tree	food, shelter
<i>Cercidium floridum</i>	Blue palo verde	tree	food, shelter
<i>Chilopsis linearis</i>	Desert willow	tree	food
<i>Dalea pulchra</i>	Indigo bush	shrub	food
<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i>	Hopbush	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Encelia farinosa</i>	Brittle bush	shrub	food
<i>Eriogonum species</i>	Buckwheat	shrub	food
<i>Fallugia paradoxa</i>	Apache plume	shrub	shelter
<i>Fraxinus velutina</i>	Arizona ash	tree	food, shelter
<i>Hymenoxys acaulis</i>	Angelita daisy	perennial	food
<i>Hyptis emoryi</i>	Desert lavender	shrub	shelter
<i>Larrea tridentata</i>	Creosote	shrub	shelter
<i>Lycium species</i>	Wolfberry	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Melampodium leucanthum</i>	Blackfoot daisy	perennial	food
<i>Muhlenbergia rigens</i>	Deer grass	grass	food
<i>Oenothera caespitosa</i>	Tufted evening primrose	perennial	food
<i>Opuntia santa rita Tubac tm</i>	Purple prickly pear	cactus	food, shelter
<i>Opuntia spinosior</i>	Cane cholla	cactus	shelter
<i>Platanus wrightii</i>	Arizona sycamore	tree	food, shelter
<i>Prosopis velutina</i>	Velvet mesquite	tree	food, shelter
<i>Psilostrophe species</i>	Paper flower	perennial	food
<i>Quercus turbinella</i>	Scrub oak	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Rhus microphylla</i>	Little leaf sumac	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Rhus ovata</i>	Sugar bush	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Rhus trilobata</i>	Three leaf sumac	shrub	food, shelter
<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>	Mexican elderberry	tree, shrub	food, shelter
<i>Sphaeralcea ambigua</i>	Globe mallow	shrub, perennial	food
<i>Vitis arizonica</i>	Arizona grape	vine	food
<i>Zinnia acerosa</i>	Desert zinnia	perennial	food
<i>Zizyphus obtusifolia</i>	Graythorn	shrub	food, shelter



Quail



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