

## Creating a Focal Point for Birds in the Garden

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**O**ne of my daughter's friends, after a visit to our home, reported at school that my daughter lives in a lodge. Our house is one-story, under 2000 square feet so I don't think the size of the house helped to form her opinion. More than likely, it was the large floor to ceiling window overlooking the backyard landscaped to attract birds that influenced her choice of words. Of course, the sound of chimney swifts echoing down the chimney into the fireplace probably helped as well!

Though the back and side edges of the yard are woody with a mix of trees and shrubs, the eye focuses on our bird garden just ten feet from the window. This is a focal point that we purposely designed. The main feature is a moss covered limestone rock nestled behind a simple cement birdbath top, which sits on a couple of bricks slightly above the ground. We planted native plants as a backdrop – woods fern, bluestem palmetto, Virginia sweetspire 'Henry's Garnet' and maidenhair fern. In the foreground is a flat rock feeder perched on stones and a squirrel-proof bird feeder. Off to the right and behind the feature are a lovely blue beech tree, a lacecap hydrangea and a suet feeder log. The plants were chosen for their beauty and are used to create perches for birds as well as cover from hawks and other predators.

To do this at your home, start by choosing an existing window where you tend to spend time relaxing. Look out this window and picture the center of your focal point. It could be a birdbath, a bird feeder or perhaps a statue if you are not interested in maintaining a bird feeding station. Once this is placed, arrange plants, being sure to consider their future size and required growing conditions. There are so many great plant choices! At Birdsong Nature Center's bird window, the inspiration for our garden, you will notice a mix of camellias, wood fern, cabbage palm, liriopse, crepe myrtle and blue beech. At the Native Nurseries bird garden, we used agarista, needle palm, maidenhair fern, Oregon grape, Evergreen Giant liriopse and river oats.

Consider your focal point a canvas, the plants your oils. Place your selections and then run back inside to view your arrangement from your window before planting. Remember the plants will grow, so give them the room they need. Discuss this with horticulturists at your local garden center. Now you are ready to plant. Over the years your garden will need to be selectively pruned, weeded and watered during droughts. Birdbaths should be sprayed out every few days to keep the water fresh and free of mosquito larvae. Birdfeeders, too, should be cleaned regularly.

Your "painting" will change as birds move in and out of view - the bright red of the cardinal, the muted gray of the titmouse, the brilliant yellow of the goldfinch in springtime. The spring green of sweetspire changes to a deep purple in autumn and blends with the bluish green fronds of the boldly textured bluestem palmetto. Ah,

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life in a lodge!

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