

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 06-10-05) Gardening for the Birds © 2005

Before beginning today's column I want to tell you that my columns from 2000 through the present are now archived on the Kitsap County Extension Website. You can access the columns by visiting http://kitsap.wsu.edu/hort/dig_this/dig_this_toc.htm. Once you get to the site you can click on each of the years from 2000 through 2005 and the title of the column will pop up. Click on the title and then read away. Enjoy!

May 18 the incredible Fay Linger, Audubon member and WSU Kitsap Master Gardener, presented a most informative talk about attracting birds to our gardens. I'll have our Extension webmistress scan Fay's attracting birds information sheets to the website and you can print them out for reference. If you don't have Internet access please call 360-337-7157 to request a mailed copy of the information.

Fay recommends planting your garden in layers using low growing plants, medium height plants and trees in the background. It's also good to mix deciduous plants along with evergreen plants. Native plants are always important for attracting birds and creating habitat but there are many hybridized plants that suite the bill too. Our native conifers provide shelter in winter and give birds a continuous source of small insects that overwinter in the trees along with the birds. Kinglets are an example of birds finding winter shelter in the fir and pines. Great Blue Herons and Eagles nest in the conifers and the hummingbirds in our garden love the firs along the edges of our property.

"Robins love cotoneaster berries," Fay says, "you'll notice though as the berries begin fermenting the robins become a bit loopy." Most birds are nesting now so even if you're feeding the birds and/or have plants to attract birds, don't become discouraged because when birds nest they don't come to the feeders as much. They're too busy defending their territory and building their nests.

Snags are also important in gardens. If you have to remove a tree or two leave parts of the stump for the birds if you can. Fay explained if you're using snags to attract pileated woodpeckers or flickers you'll need to drill some starter holes first. We've been patiently waiting in our own garden for the woodpeckers to come to our snags and instead they love hammering on our house instead. I'm going out this weekend to drill some holes in snags. I'll report back.

You'll also want plants with tubular flowers to attract hummingbirds to your garden. Fay says, "Try columbines (*Aquilegia*), hostas, sage, red flowering current (*Ribes*), red hot poker (*Kniphofia*), hardy fuchsias, salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*) and *Crococsmia*. She recommends planting hardy *Fuchsia magellanica* near your hummingbird feeder to attract the hummers.

To make your own hummingbird nectar cook one-fourth cup sugar with one cup water. Boil it for several minutes and then refrigerate the mixture. It will store in the refrigerator for one to two weeks, but if the mixture becomes cloudy discard it immediately because

bacteria is growing and that is harmful to the tiny birds. The nectar should be changed every two to three days and make sure you clean and sanitize the feeder regularly too.

Many of our local birds love suet. You can make your own by combining one pound lard, one cup or better of quick cooking oats and one cup of natural chunky peanut butter. Mix up all the ingredients and store in the refrigerator. The mixture can be made into cakes to fit into the wire suet feeders. Save a few of the commercial suet containers to form your own suet cakes.

Fay recommends the Cornell University Website <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/> for further research on birds, birdhouses and attracting birds to your garden. She also recommends "Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest," by Russell Link, University of Washington Press, ISBN 0295978201 available at local bookstores and through our Kitsap Regional Library system.

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