

## Plants to Attract Songbirds and Caterpillars

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Attracting songbirds is usually done by having bird feeders and waterers. Landscape plants also play a role in attracting songbirds, especially those that produce berries and some that caterpillars like.

We know berry and other seed producing plants attract birds. A few good landscape plants for berries include redosier and gray dogwood, red chokeberry, serviceberry, crabapples, hawthorn, cherry and plum. There are many others.

Keep in mind not all plants are good for birds. Popular plants considered to provide poor nutrition for birds, and best avoided for this use, are bush honeysuckle, ornamental or callery pear, burning bush, and privet.

Plants not usually considered for attracting birds are plants on which insects lay eggs. Those that hatch into caterpillars are especially helpful since songbirds mostly feed their young insects.

When we see a caterpillar on a leaf, the first instinct might be to pull it off and stomp on it or apply an insecticide to kill it. This thinking needs to change and is beginning to.

For example, milkweed is being planted to help Monarch butterflies. Milkweed is planted as food for caterpillars as this is the only food they eat. The adult butterfly will gather nectar from a variety of flowers.

While plant leaves may end up having some holes from caterpillars, most feeding on trees and shrubs is harmless. With the large number of leaves present, plants retain enough leaves for photosynthesis.

Whenever an insect is noticed on a plant, it is important to identify what the insect is and if it is even harmful. And to remember most caterpillars will eventually be butterflies or moths.

In many cases, control is not needed or justified on trees and shrubs nor on perennial flowers. The insects are simply part of a healthy ecosystem that supports many other living things like songbirds.

Trees known to support a diversity of caterpillars include oaks, willow, cherry, black cherry, plum, river birch and hawthorn.

In research, oaks were found to support more than 550 species of butterfly and moth caterpillars. Oak blossoms are also known to benefit pollinators like native bees.

Unfortunately, oaks are under planted in Nebraska communities. Pin oak was overplanted and gave oaks a bad name because of iron chlorosis where the leaves turn yellow.

While pin oak is not recommended for Nebraska, some great oaks to consider are red, scarlet, black, bur, and white oaks. And there's many more, like shingle, dwarf chinkapin, shumard and chestnut oaks.

For an even longer list of oaks to plant in Nebraska, search Oaks for Nebraska on the internet and look for the list provided by the Nebraska Forest Service.

And for additional lists of landscape plants for wildlife in Nebraska, go to <https://go.unl.edu/35c4>