

# Creating a Bird Friendly Garden

Tips and advice on how to attract birds to your backyard.

*A bird-friendly garden provides the essential elements that all birds need; food, water, shelter and a place to nest. Creating a bird-friendly garden involves several steps, including designing the garden and choosing suitable plants to create a garden that works for you and the birds.*



## Simple Tips to Attract Birds

Try to:

- Avoid using chemical sprays or applying chemical based fertilizers as this reduces insects that birds thrive on.
- Place organic litter such as leaves and lawn clippings on garden beds as mulch.
- Keep your cat inside or provide an outside cat enclosure. This helps protect your cat as well as the birds and other wildlife such as lizards and native frogs.
- Deter cats from entering your property, by spraying them with water, or plant Lavender, Coleus and Penny Royal throughout the beds together with orange peel, as cats dislike the smell.



## To Feed or Not to Feed?

It is much healthier for birds to gather natural food from gardens than to be fed directly by people. However, many people enjoy the contact they have with the birds they provide food for.

If you want to provide extra food for birds make sure that:

- The feeding area is kept really clean to prevent spread of disease.
- Don't feed meat-eating birds as this encourages predators who will scare away the little birds you are trying to attract.
- Provide good quality natural foods, such as fruit or bird seed rather than bread, as this doesn't provide the nutrition they need.



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## Our Vanishing Birds

It might come as a surprise to some but little birds are under threat. Data has shown that once common birds such as Finches, small Honeyeaters, Fairy-wrens and Silvereyes are becoming rare or in some places are no longer being seen at all. There are many reasons but loss of habitat that enable them to raise their families is the biggest. The removal of shrub cover means that little birds face competition from larger birds for food and shelter. Feral cats along with foxes, have also placed a significant toll on our small bird population. Cats and dogs need to be supervised when outside so they don't impact on the native bird population. Cats in particular need to be kept contained day and night. Irrespective of where you live, there are some simple things that you can do to help our little birds.

## Creating Bird Friendly Gardens

The key to creating a bird friendly garden is to ensure you provide water, food and shelter. The best thing to do is to plant native trees and shrubs as this will attract birds. It's a bit like creating a restaurant and setting the table for the birds to come. Birds require habitat to escape from predators and inclement weather, and small birds prefer not to cross open spaces. Linking plantings to create corridors through your garden and the neighbours' garden and/or adjacent bushland will help.



### Garden Design

Simple open gardens provide little shelter or food for birds but with a little effort you can change that.

Plant:

- Denser shrubs close together so they form protective thickets for birds to hide in.
- Shrubs that provide a variety of foods: nectar, seeds, fruit and habitat for insects.
- A variety of shrubs that not only flower to give you colour but also foliage variation. Choose plants that flower at different times of the year to extend the period of nectar.
- Natives that are endemic to your local area.
- Underneath trees to create a dense protective understory and fill in bare patches.
- *Lilly Pillies* that have showy white flowers, to make a great hedge or screen.
- Native grasses that can seed and only require occasional cutting.

Contact your local nursery or Ipswich City Council who provide free plants each year from their nursery.  
Contact: [www.ipswich.qld.gov.au](http://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au).

## Be Entertained by the Birds

These little birds are not only beautiful but can be entertaining as well. Nectar eating birds, such as Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, can be a source of amusement as they flit amongst the shrubs or flowers looking for food. Plants such as *Callistemon*, *Melaleuca* and *Grevillea species*, which come in various forms from tall trees to ground covers, are a great source of food for nectar eaters. These will also attract insects which in turn will attract other species. The insect eating birds like Fairy-wrens, Magpie-larks, Willy Wagtails, Grey Fantails and Eastern Yellow Robins will keep your gardens insect free. Grass eating birds such as Double-barred Finches are cute to watch as they search for seed.





## Providing Water

The provision of a reliable source of fresh water will attract many bird species to your garden. You will also help them survive periods of hot or dry weather. Unfortunately, birds are vulnerable when they are drinking or bathing.

You can help by:

- Locating the bird bath in dappled shade enables the water to stay cool and reduces algae growth.
- Place the bird bath in locations where cats and other predators cannot ambush them.
- Hanging a saucer from a tree, eaves or on upright logs set in the garden can also be effective.
- Grow plants close to birdbaths to enable the birds to perch and survey the landscape or enable them to post a “lookout bird” while the others drink and bathe.



Bird baths should be shallow so small birds can stand in them without drowning. Stones can be placed inside to allow different levels of depth for the birds to choose.

- Replace the water and clean the container regularly to avoid the spread of disease.
- Ask a neighbour to add water if you are away for a prolonged period to ensure the birds water supply is constant.
- If you have a natural water source (dam, stream or wetland) plant the vegetation along the banks and allow native grasses to grow high to create a buffer zone around the edge.



## Habitat Shelter

Birds use a range of plants for different reasons, such as shelter, nesting material and food. Plants with variety of foliage densities are essential for small birds because they provide shelter and a place to hide from predators.

Shrubs with prickly leaves such as; *Bursaria spinosa*, *Hakea species*, *Acacia species* and *Leptospermum species* are particularly useful for little birds.

*Lomandra Longifolia* and *Lomandra Hystrix* are tufted grass-like plants which are useful for border planting and underneath larger trees. *Westringia species* or *Lavender* can be trimmed into hedges. Herbs and other small shrubs provide dense cover and flowers to attract bees. Try *Basil*, *Nasturtium species*, *Parsley* and *Tarragon*. Flowering plants, such as *Cosmos species*, *Buddleia species* *Queen Anne's Lace*, *Salvia species* and even *Aloe Vera* which can be grown in pots.



Creepers like *Mandevilla species*, *Pandorea Pandorana*, *Pandorea Jasminoides* and *Passiflora Aurantia* can be grown over arches or along walls between sections in your garden to create links between lower storey and taller trees. Vines grow quick and Native Sarsparilla can be grown over a fence to create a living fence. Bigger birds such as Magpies, Tawny Frogmouths, owls and parrots are attracted to tall trees, *Eucalyptus*, *Casuarina*, *Banksia* and *Acacia species*. The aim is to plant a variety of species and have a balance as planting too many of one kind will attract a limited variety of birds. Too many *Grevillea species* will attract aggressive nectar eating birds, like Noisy Miners and will discourage little birds. Some ground cover *Grevillea species* can drape over retaining walls and can be planted underneath taller shrubs.



## Nest Building Materials

In time your garden will create materials suitable for constructing a nest. Leaves, bark, sticks, twigs and spider webs are sought after. Logs, branches and rocks also attract other wildlife, such as frogs and lizards. Planting *Melaleuca species* or prickly plants will provide nesting sites for Pigeons and Thornbills. So having a garden that might appear messy is not a bad thing.

Sometimes birds may take the materials to build elsewhere. Adding artificial nest boxes in suburbia can provide habitat as many natural tree hollows have disappeared. Nest boxes should be placed up high away from ground predators.

Plans for building a nest box for various species are available at [www.birdlife.org.au](http://www.birdlife.org.au) (search info sheets).

Nest boxes need to be monitored and maintained. They are not a set and forget accessory to the garden.



## Food Trees

Birds eat a variety of plants that provide nectar, seeds or insects, so planting a variety of nectar producing plants such as *Correas*, *Epacris*, *Mistletoe* and *Xanthorrhoea* will attract Honeyeaters and Loriekeets. Multi-purpose plants like *Acacia*, *Banksia*, *Grevillea*, *Hakea*, *Leptospermum*, *Melaleuca* and *Wattles*, which range from ground covers to small trees, and *Casuarinas* will provide seeds for cockatoos and pigeons. Finches will be attracted to native grasses (*Poa* and *Sedges*).

*Acacia*, *Bursaria*, *Correa*, *Harden*, *Bergia* and *Melaleuca* attract insects for small birds such as Robins, Wrens and Treecreepers. *Figs* and *Lilly Pillies* produce fruits that birds such as doves, Rosellas, Orioles and Silvereyes like. *Flax Lillies* have small berries and are suitable as border or under-storey planting. Fruit trees and shrubs can be grown in pots but require frequent watering and fertilising.



## Have you found a baby bird?

Spring and early summer are traditionally the times when baby birds are found on the ground. Sometimes the nest has been disturbed by wind or storms and baby birds are unfortunately knocked out or their nest is destroyed.

Contrary, to popular belief, birds will not reject a chick because it has been handled by a human. Reuniting a baby bird with its parent is the best thing you can do for a healthy, uninjured baby bird.

But before you pick up the bird there are a few things you should consider.



## What kind of bird is it?

Some babies are born in a nest, without feathers (altricial). They need their parent's help to survive the cold and be fed until they are able to fly. An altricial baby can be put back into the nest provided it can be reached. If not, a “baby bird bucket” can be made (see ahead for instructions). Other baby birds are born with feathers and are able to feed themselves immediately. They may still require rescuing from predators, so see if you can find the parents before picking up the bird.



## Does it need to be rescued?

Many baby birds are inadvertently taken into care as fledglings. Sometimes they have just landed on the ground or been a bit too adventurous in learning to fly.

If the parents are nearby, then simply make sure the bird is kept out of harm's way and safe from predators.



Other birds like Masked Lapwings, Swampheens and Moorheens give birth to *Percocial Chicks*. They are usually covered in down and have their eyes open and can walk soon after hatching.

These birds nest on the ground and will stay under the watchful protection of their parents. They shouldn't be placed in a nest.

If it appears to be in danger and you can't locate the parents, place it under a thick bush or shrub nearby, it will

chirp to call attention. Its parents will most likely be nearby and will return when they feel it is safe to do so.

Do not attempt to feed the bird or offer it water, instead keep a watch on it to observe if the parents return.

Brush Turkey chicks are usually left to fend for themselves and it is best to give them space to hide undercover.

Unfortunately birds that raise their young in tree hollows, like parrots, lorikeets, kookaburras and kingfishers, are more difficult to re-nest because often the nest is up high or unable to be located.

## What Should I do?

- If the bird can't be returned to the nest, is naked or near naked altricial hatchlings.
- If it is injured or was retrieved from the mouth of a cat or dog.
- It's cold and/or lethargic.
- You notice the parent dead nearby or you haven't been able to reunite it with its parents.
- Place the bird into a lidded ventilated small box.
- If it has no feathers, wrap a hot water bottle inside a towel to keep it warm.
- Keep it somewhere dark and quiet while you contact your local wildlife carer or vet.

## Can I Keep the Bird?

Under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992, it is illegal to keep protected wildlife without an appropriate permit. The bird will have a better chance of survival if it is given to trained wildlife carers, who have specialised equipment and can provide the correct food to assist in their recovery.

## How to make a Baby Bird Bucket

1. Punch several holes in the bottom of a plastic bucket for drainage. If you don't have a bucket, use an ice-cream container, a hanging plant basket or similar. But it must have a handle for hanging.
2. Place a layer of leaves or grass in the bottom or scoop up any remnants of the broken nest and place in the bottom. Put a stick in the bucket on an angle by poking the end into one of the holes. This acts as a ladder for the baby bird and its parents to get in and out.
3. Place the baby gently into the bucket and hang it at head height in a leafy tree or bush away from direct sunlight and predators as close as possible to where you found the baby bird.
4. Observe from a distance to check if the parents return to feed it. If they do not return before nightfall, the baby will need to be taken to a wildlife carer.

