

TOP 5 FLORIDA NATIVE TREES TO ATTRACT BIRDS

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To attract native birds of song and beauty to your back yard you need three basic requirements: tree/plant habitat, water and food. Native trees give birds a place to hide from predators, nest and feed. Native trees that give both food and cover are highly prized by birds. You might think you need a lot of space for native trees that attract birds, but even if your planting area is limited, it's still possible to cultivate trees under or among existing canopy to attract beautiful birds.

1. WINGED SUMAC



Winged Sumac, (*Rhus copallinum*). Winged Sumac is a member of the cashew family and is also known as the "bird seed tree." Winged sumac does not cause skin irritations like other members of its family including poison sumac. Winged sumac is recognized by its long-odd pinnate alternating leaves with a winged rachis. The leaf can reach one foot long with 9 to 23 leaflets per leaf. It is one of the top Florida native trees to attract birds. Winged sumac blooms from spring into early fall where its flowers supply nectar and pollen for insects. The resulting clusters of fruits turn into prized seed during winter months when food is scarce. A deciduous tree, it gives a showy canopy of bright orange-red in the fall before its leaves drop. During the spring and summer its leaves are glossy green and provide a thicket of cover for wildlife. The fruits are edible by wildlife and humans and can be processed into jelly. It is drought tolerant and typical dimensions are 10 to 24 feet in height. It's

a good tree to plant near power lines because it stays small. Winged Sumac fruits and seeds are relished by over 50 species of native birds including warblers, woodpeckers, chickadees, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, thrashers and mockingbirds.

2. OAK



Oak, (*Quercus spp.*). These large beautiful trees are a favorite for many birds across the country—not to mention the great summer shade they provide for our Urban Forest. Oak tree acorns are an integral part of the food chain for birds and wildlife, so planting just one Oak really helps support habitat diversity in your yard. Birds love Oaks and many species use the crooks and cavities of Oak trees for nesting and shelter. Birds are also drawn to the abundance of insects and acorns found on Oaks. If you want to plant an Oak, be sure to plant one native to Florida such as Southern Live Oak, Turkey Oak, Shumard Oak, Bluejack Oak, Southern Red Oak, White Oak, Swamp Laurel Oak, Overcup Oak, Swamp Chestnut Oak, Water Oak, Post Oak, Black Oak, or Willow Oak. Plant Oaks far away from the power line right-of-ways so they don't get topped.

3. DOGWOOD



Dogwood (*Cornus Florida*) With its white, showy spring blooms that turn into delicious red berries and vibrant Fall foliage, you can't go wrong with Florida Dogwood. The flowering Dogwood grows to heights of 40 feet and the crown is broad, open, and

symmetrical with many spreading and upright limbs for perching and nesting. Birds that love Dogwoods include mockingbirds, cardinals, titmice, bluebirds, thrushes, woodpeckers and catbirds who dine on the fleshy fruit of the trees. To keep Dogwoods happy and healthy plant them under large trees in partial sun and keep their roots cool with layers of acidic Oak leaves. If you live in the southeastern United States, choose *Cornus Florida*.

4. MULBERRY



Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*) The Red Mulberry occurs throughout Florida. Red Mulberry is a medium-sized tree, rarely reaching 70 feet high with a trunk two feet in diameter, and often grown understory. Male and female flowers may occur on the same tree and are borne in catkin-like clusters, with male clusters longer than female ones. Mature mulberry fruits are dark red, turning purple when ripe. They are also sweet, edible and greatly relished by wildlife as well as by humans. They resemble blackberries with a fibrous core but without the large seeds. Mulberry attracts cedar waxwings, warblers, orioles; tanagers, catbirds, thrashers, mockingbirds, bluebirds and other thrushes.

5. SUGARBERRY



Sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*) Sugarberry tree is also known as Hackberry and is the most widely distributed *Celtis* species in Florida. It becomes a large tree 60-80 feet high with a trunk up to 2 feet in diameter at maturity. It is found on a variety of sites but chiefly in hammocks, riverbanks, streams and lakes throughout the state. The alternate leaves are thin, smooth, light green on both sides and 2-6 inches long. Sugarberry flowers are small, greenish or cream-colored, may appear perfect (having both male and female parts in one flower) but are unisexual in function with both female and male flowers on the same tree. Sugarberry fruit ripens in September, is orange red or dark purple and ¼ inch in diameter. It's a sought-after food for wildlife and the fruit's sweet taste gives rise to the name "Sugarberry." Birds attracted to Sugarberry include robins, cedar waxwings, orioles, woodpeckers, thrushes, yellow warblers, thrashers, mockingbirds, red tanagers, bluebirds.

When birds eat berries and seeds of trees and plants they spread them in their droppings later. This seed dispersal often leads to propagation of new trees. So it's a good idea to use native trees and plants instead of introduced species to attract birds. Native trees and plants are extremely adapted to local soil types and climate. They don't require special winter protection or soil amendments to thrive. Florida native plants are being stressed or extinguished by invasive and exotic species such as Brazilian Pepper, Chinaberry, Chinese Tallowtree and Melaleuca.



Mockingbird eating native Holly berries.

By incorporating native trees into the landscape, you're creating a perfect sanctuary that benefits birds and many other forms of wildlife as well as our native Florida tree canopy. You can get these native trees at the Annual Windermere Treebute Arbor Day Festival every January or your local Florida Native Tree Nursery. For more information contact: theresamyers@earthlink.net or info@nehrlinggardens.org