

Creating Bird Sanctuaries in your Yards with Native Plants

Presented by John Barber (jcbarber27@gmail.com)

Plant natives now. Then plant more native plants.

RI Wild Plant Society Spring Sales---Come early, some plants will sell out!

May 9, 2026, 9:00 – 2:00, Casey Farm, 2325 Boston Neck, Saunderstown, RI.

September 12, 2026, 9:30 to noon.

Simple actions to take now in your yard and your watershed:

Provide a wide variety of native trees, shrubs, grasses, sedges, ferns, perennials

Provide clean and safe water year-round

Never use insecticides or rodenticides

Never permit cats outdoors – and remove strays

Construct a five-layer habitat:

1. Trees for canopy
2. Understory trees (dogwood, pawpaw, sassafras, hawthorn...)
3. Shrubs (remove invasives such as privet, barberry, forsythia, burning bush)
4. Perennials (mass species in clumps)
5. Leaf litter, logs, partially-buried stones, patches of bare earth, small sand piles

Use straight species or as close to straight species as possible

Create thickets that can hide nests in the spring and summer

“The aim here...is to provide for birds in all four seasons –

bugs, buds, and shelter in spring,
bugs, nest sites, and nest materials in summer,
bugs, fruit, nutritious berries, and shelter in autumn, and
seeds, berries, and shelter in winter.”

(Modified from Sorenson, *Planting Native to Attract Birds to Your Yard*)

Some Native Shrubs recommended for Rhode Island

Bayberry [Myrica pensylvanica](#)

Bladdernut [Staphylea trifolia](#)

Buttonbush [Cephalanthus occidentalis](#)

Chokeberry [Aronia arbutifolia, or A.floribunda](#)

Dogwood, grey [Cornus racemosa](#)

Dogwood, red osier [Cornus sericea](#)

Dogwood, silky [Cornus amomum](#)

Elderberry [Sambucus nigra, or S. racemosa](#)

Fragrant sumac [Rhus aromatica](#)

Inkberry [Ilex glabra](#)

Ninebark [Physocarpus opulifolius](#)

Winterberry [Ilex verticillata](#)

Regional Native Plant Sources

Do not dig up plants in the wild!

Ask for neonicotinoid-free certification from nurseries

Propagate and trade plants – collect or buy seeds and grow them yourself

Seed source: Northeast Seed Collective www.northeastseedcollective.com

Native Plant Sales and Nurseries

RI Wild Plant Society twice yearly sales
Plant Community, LLC, East Greenwich, RI
Garden in the Woods, Framingham, MA
Butterfly Effect Farm, Westport, MA
Bluestem Natives, Norwell, MA

Nurseries who stock native plants along with other perennials

Blue Moon Farm Perennials, Wakefield, RI
Prickly Ed's Cactus Plants, Barrington, RI
Home Grown, Pawtucket, RI

Recommended reading

Doug Tallamy books

Bringing Nature Home

The Nature of Oaks

Nature's Best Hope

The Birds at my Table, Darryl Jones

Planting Native to Attract Birds to your Yard, Sharon Sorenson

Noah's Garden, Sara Stein

William Cullina books

Growing and Propagating Wildflowers

Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines

Native Ferns, Mosses, and Grasses

The Brother Gardeners and other books by Andrea Wulf (History)

The Northeast Native Plant Primer by Uli Lorimer

Note: Ocean State Library system may not have many of these books but will provide inter-library loan if you request it.

Websites (maps to show if a plant is native to your ecoregion)

RI Wild Plant Society

www.riwps.org

RI Native Plant Guide

www.uri.edu/rinativeplants

National Audubon Society

www.audubon.org/native-plants

New England Native Plant Database

www.GoBotany.nativeplanttrust.org

Homegrown National Park (Tallamy)

www.homegrownnationalpark.org

National Wildlife Fund

www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder/

Dark Sky Lighting recommendations

www.darksky.org

Bird House ideas and plans

www.nestwatch.org