Small Native Trees for Bird Cover and Food

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One of the best ways to increase the number of birds that visit or reside in your landscape is to plant small trees that provide cover and food. Here are some native trees to consider.

Texas persimmon (Diospyros texana) grows to 15 ft. tall. The tree forms a dense crown that provides birds nesting sites and foliage in which to hunt insects. The tree also has exfoliating silvery bark that is an attractive feature in the landscape. Texas persimmon is deciduous in San Antonio.

Texas persimmon has the male and female versions on separate trees. If you have a female it produces fruit in late summer that attracts many species of birds. In my landscape in July the crown is alive with motion as golden-fronted and ladder-backed woodpeckers are joined by thrashers, mockingbirds, cardinals and orioles feeding on the ripening fruit. The birds pull pieces of the fruit off the large seed.

If you live in a neighborhood where parent Texas persimmon plants exist, it is relatively easy to find small seedlings to transplant. You may be pruning them down as weed seedlings in the absence of knowledge of their value. Texas persimmon are also available at native plant sales and native plant nurseries in the region.

Anacua (Ehretia anacua) is and evergreen tree that will grow to 30 feet or taller. The crown is very dense with shiny green leaves that are rough to the touch. So rough, that an alternate name is sandpaper tree. Birds readily nest in the thick crown.

Anacuas produce attractive clusters of white bloom in March followed by sticky yellow berries that mature in June. The berries are a favorite bird food. Like the Texas persimmon the anacua becomes alive with birds when the berries ripen.

Sandpaper tree makes an attractive specimen tree in the landscape but it is best not to plant the tree over the patio or driveway because of the sticky berries. Anacua will also send up shoots from the roots which will form a thicket if they are allowed to persist. The species is often available at area nurseries and is even one of the trees included on the CPS shade tree rebate.

Other native trees that improve habitat for birds in area landscapes are brasil (Condolia hookerii), Mexican olive (Cordia boissieri), Mexican plum (Prunus mexicana), yaupon holly (Ilex vomitoria), possomhaw holly (Ilex decidua), Mexican buckeye (Ungnadia speciosa), Texas and Mexican redbud ( Cercis canadensis), and La coma (Bumelia celastrina).

In addition to their value to wildlife, most of the trees provide landscape value with blooms, winter berries, and/or attractive foliage.