Water for the Birds

Distribute 7-30-15

Birds are still feasting on the insects, berries, seeds, and flowers produced by the generous rains this winter and spring but they are hard-pressed to find drinking and bathing water after 4 weeks without rain in July.

If you want to help them out, the simplest option is to set-up one or more bird baths. Your favorite landscape nursery, wild bird supply store, or big box store has a large selection of bird baths from which to choose. Some are very decorative which is great as long as they are functional as well.

To maximize use by birds select a bird bath that is relatively shallow. A rough textured masonry bowl that gradually deepens to reach 2 inches deep at its center works well. Birds aren’t fussy however, they will readily drink from a plastic or metal garbage can cover if they are kept full of fresh water.

Between birds splashing and evaporation expect to have to refill the bird bath every day. Other than it makes it necessary to commit some time, the daily refilling is good in that it allows you the opportunity to rinse out the basin each day and means that water won’t sit long enough for mosquitoes to use it for a breeding site.

Place the bird baths in a relatively open space with 6 to 8 feet between the bath and the nearest thick shrub or other cover. Six to 8 feet is close enough for the birds to use as shelter if a hawk moves in but it is too far from the bird bath for a cat to launch a leap to catch a wet bird.

The bird bath should also be in a spot where you can observe the birds in action. If your neighborhood has some thickets and mature plants, it is not unusual to host 9 or 10 different species of drinking/bathing birds every day.

For even more action provide drinking water and a shallow bathing area with a water feature that includes recirculating water. Birds are especially attracted to moving water. Expect migrating and more secretive species like painted buntings, orioles and warblers to come in for easy observation if your water source includes moving water. Visit with your nursery or wild bird supply store to review the water recirculating options. They can be as simple as a dripper for the bird bath or as elaborate as a backyard waterfall and stream.