

Landscape Plants for Wildlife

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This NebGuide lists some of the plants that benefit songbirds and other wildlife in Nebraska. It includes information about plants, their wildlife benefits, and where they grow best.

Several plants in this list have a variety of cultivars with features that may differ from those indicated. Also, there may be good plant selections for your area that are not included.

Consult NebGuide G1571, *Backyard Wildlife, Planting for Habitat* for additional guidelines on plant selection, including: 1) where you live and what is nearby, 2) food and cover, 3) plants for all seasons, 4) plant diversity, and 5) advantages of native species.

We have tried to include the more important landscape plants to consider for wildlife benefits around homes or for planting on acreages or farms. The larger areas of acreages and farms often include wildlife habitats such as grasslands,

wooded riparian (creek) zones, windbreaks, vegetated ravines, tree groves, and odd uncultivated areas. Conservation of these natural habitat areas benefits wildlife.

Protecting snags (dead trees) benefits cavity nesting birds such as chickadees, woodpeckers, tree swallows, owls, and others. If the snag is in a location where it might cause a safety or other concern, consider cutting it about 15 feet above the ground. Leaving the tall stump will provide nesting and foraging spots for cavity nesters. Some property owners on land without snags have created them using small tree trunks placed vertically in the ground like tall (15 feet) fence posts.

Tables show selected plants that benefit songbirds and other wildlife in Nebraska, the sites where they grow best, and their wildlife benefits during summer (S), fall (F), and winter (W). Bold italic letters or more stars indicate greater documented value to wildlife, especially songbirds.

- An asterisk (*) in front of the plant name indicates a species native to Nebraska. The symbol (‡) indicates our selections of the top 20 + 2 plants (20 trees, shrubs, vines; 2 native grasses, flowers) for songbird benefits in Nebraska.
- Landscape value only, not wildlife benefit. More stars (1-3) indicate greater landscape value for planting in backyards and near living spaces. Plants with fewer stars are usually better suited for larger backyards, acreages, or farms. Check comments.
- The plant grows well in: full sun ☉, partial shade ◐, and/or full shade ◑.
- The plant grows well in: ☉ dry sites (drought tolerant); ◐ moderately dry sites; or ◑ moist soils (may need water during dry conditions).
- Performs well across Nebraska (All) or best in eastern (E) or western (W) portions.

CONIFERS (Excellent winter cover, food, and nesting sites)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
white fir (<i>Abies concolor</i>)	★★★	★	F	SFW	☉ ◐	☉ ◑	50 / 30	ALL	3-7	1
*eastern redcedar (<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>)	★	★	FW	SFW	☉	☉	50 / 20	ALL	3-9	2
*Rocky Mountain juniper (<i>J. scopulorum</i>)	★	★	FW	SFW	☉	☉	40 / 15	W	3-7	2
Colorado blue spruce (<i>Picea pungens</i> var. <i>glauca</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SFW	☉	☉	60 / 30	ALL	2-7	1
Norway spruce (<i>Picea abies</i>)	★★★	★		SFW	☉ ◐	◑	60 / 35	ALL	2-7	1
white spruce (<i>Picea glauca</i>)	★★★	★	F	SFW	☉ ◐	☉ ◑	50 / 25	ALL	2-5	1
jack pine (<i>Pinus banksiana</i>)	★★	★★	F	SFW	☉	☉	60 / 25	ALL	2-6	1, 3
lacebark pine (<i>Pinus bungeana</i>)	★★★		F	SFW	☉	◑	40 / 25	ALL	4-8	1, 3
pinyon pine (<i>Pinus edulis</i>)	★★★	★★	F	SFW	☉	☉	30 / 20	ALL	5	1, 3
*limber pine (<i>Pinus flexilis</i>)	★★★		F	SFW	☉	☉	50 / 25	ALL	4-7	1, 3
Austrian Pine (<i>Pinus nigra</i>)	★★	★★	F	SFW	☉	☉	75 / 45	ALL	4-7	1, 3, 4

CONIFERS (Excellent winter cover, food, and nesting sites)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
*ponderosa pine (<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>)	★★★	★★	F	SFW	○	☹	50 / 35	ALL	3-8	1, 3
eastern white pine (<i>Pinus strobus</i>)	★★★	★★	F	SFW	○ ●	☹	60 / 45	ALL	3-7	1, 3, 5
Douglas-fir (<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>)	★★★	★	F	SFW	○ ●	☹☹	80 / 35	ALL	4-6	1

DECIDUOUS TREES (Nesting and foraging sites, food, canopy, and habitat structure)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
*Rocky Mountain Maple (<i>Acer glabrum</i>)	★★★	★★	S	SF	○ ●	☹	30 / 20	W	3-8	6
*sugar maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>)	★★★	★★	S	SF	○ ●	☹	60 / 40	E	4-8	6, 7
*Saskatoon serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>)	★★	★	S	SF	○ ●	☹	12 / 10	ALL	4-5	7, 8, 9
*shadbowl serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>)	★★★	★	S	SF	○ ●	☹	18 / 15	E	3-7	7, 8, 9
hickory (<i>Carya</i> spp.)	★★	★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹☹	60 / 40	E	4-9	10
*hackberry (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>)	★★	★★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹	70 / 55	ALL	2-9	11
*hawthorn (<i>Crataegus</i> spp.)	★★	★★	FW	SF	○	☹	20 / 20	ALL	3-8	9, 12
persimmon (<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>)	★★		FW	SF	○ ●	☹☹	30 / 25	E	4-9	5, 13
*white ash (<i>Fraxinus americana</i>)	★★	★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹	70 / 40	ALL	3-9	7, 14
*green ash (<i>F. pennsylvanica</i>)	★★	★★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹☹	70 / 40	ALL	3-9	14
*black walnut (<i>Juglans nigra</i>)	★	★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹	70 / 50	ALL	4-9	15

Comments

- Nesting sites for early-nesting robins, chipping sparrows, mourning doves, others.
- A top winter food and cover source. Unless managed, will spread through bird droppings into pastures or grasslands.
- Seeds consumed by many birds. Pine branches are not very dense so a small grouping provides better winter cover.
- Moderately susceptible to pine wilt disease. Avoid Scotch pine because it is highly susceptible and generally killed by pine wilt, which is moving westward in Nebraska.
- Protect from excessive winds.
- Avoid boxelder (*A. negundo*) and silver (*A. saccharinum*) maples near homes and living areas because they are somewhat messy and have weak wood.
- Autumn leaf color
- Showy flowers
- Ornamental fruit
- Grafted varieties have faster growth and nut production than those from seed.
- Often have leaf galls, which may reduce aesthetic appeal but don't significantly harm the tree.
- Thornless cultivars are available if desired. Fallen fruits may grow into young seedling trees.
- Interesting shape; fruit edible after frost.
- Plant seedless varieties where branches may overhang gutters. 'Patmore,' 'Autumn Purple,' and 'Cimarron' ash varieties are less susceptible to insect and disease injury.
- Messy as a landscape tree and needs deep, fertile soils. Wood is valuable, nuts edible. The chemical juglone, from walnut roots, may inhibit the growth of other plants under the canopy.
- Cultivars such as 'Sargent,' 'Prairifire,' and 'Snowdrift,' are disease-resistant and attractive to birds. Other good selections for Nebraska that attract birds include 'Bob White,' 'Indian Magic,' 'Mary Potter,' 'Ormiston Roy,' 'Red Jade,' and 'Red Splendor.' Birds, however, do not readily eat the fruits of 'Donald Wyman' and 'Red Jewel' varieties.
- Fruits discolor concrete and ground so avoid over walks, patios, and driveways.
- Nebraska state tree. Large cottonwoods are preferred nesting sites for Baltimore orioles and warbling vireos. Choose seedless varieties where the wind-blown seeds may be a concern and avoid planting cottonwoods near homes because the wood is weak and not durable in strong winds. Suggested varieties include: 'Platte,' 'Mighty Mo,' and 'Majesty.'
- Acorns are overall a top wildlife food, especially for game animals and larger songbirds; small birds consume broken pieces. Squirrels and deer can become too numerous in suburban areas so plan for a balance of oaks and other trees so there is diversity in the landscape.
- Suckers will eventually form a dense thicket, which provides excellent nesting and escape cover, but avoid in sites with limited space.
- The nonnative winged euonymus (*Euonymus alata*) and wintercreeper or climbing euonymus (*E. fortunei*) are listed as invasive weeds in some eastern states.
- The nonnative wayfaringtree (*Viburnum lantana*) and European cranberrybush (*V. opulus*) are invasive weeds in some eastern states.
- Cotoneaster species listed in the table have been used without being noted as invasive. Some cotoneaster species, however, including Franchet (*C. franchetii*), silverleaf (*C. pannosus*), and milkflower (*C. lacteus*) are invasive in other states, primarily California.
- Gangly form is best for out-of-the-way spots or larger areas.
- Both male and female plants are required for fruit production. Aggressive woody growth becomes too rank for small spots or on houses.
- Plant these native vine-like honeysuckles where they can climb on a trellis or fence. Avoid the nonnative, invasive Amur honeysuckle (*L. maackii*).
- Growth form is less coarse than most vines and suitable for a variety of sites.
- Patches or brambles make excellent escape cover and nesting sites. Can be thorny and typically die back in winter so best planted in odd areas or field edges.

DECIDUOUS TREES (Nesting and foraging sites, food, canopy, and habitat structure)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
*flowering crabapple (<i>Malus</i> spp.)	★★★	★★	FW	SF	○	☹	15 / 15	ALL	4-8	8, 9, 16
*red mulberry (<i>Morus rubra</i>)	★	★★	S	SF	○ ●	☹	40 / 40	ALL	5-9	17
*eastern cottonwood (<i>Populus deltoides</i>)	★	★★	S	SF	○	☹	80 / 60	E	2-9	7, 18
*black cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	★★	★	S	SF	○	☹	60 / 25	E	3-9	9, 17
*white oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹☹	60 / 50	E	3-8	7, 19
swamp white oak (<i>Quercus bicolor</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹☹	60 / 50	ALL	3-8	19
*red oak (<i>Quercus borealis [rubra]</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹☹	70 / 50	ALL	4-7	7, 19
*bur oak (<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹☹	70 / 50	ALL	2-8	19
*chinkapin oak (<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹☹	60 / 45	ALL	4-7	19
*black oak (<i>Quercus velutina</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹	60 / 50	E	4	19

TALL AND MEDIUM SHRUBS (Nesting sites, food, cover near the ground)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone ^e	Comments
*pagoda dogwood (<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>)	★★	★	SF	SF	○ ●	☹	20 / 20	E	3-7	8, 9
*gray dogwood (<i>Cornus racemosa</i>)	★★	★★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹☹	10 / 10	ALL	4-8	7, 8, 9
American hazelnut (<i>Corylus americana</i>)	★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹	10 / 7	ALL	4-9	
beaked hazelnut (<i>Corylus cornuta</i>)	★★	★	FW	SF	○	☹	8 / 5	ALL	4-8	
*eastern wahoo (<i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i>)	★★	★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹	12 / 10	ALL	3-7	7, 9, 20, 21
*American (wild) plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>)	★★	★★	SF	SF	○ ●	☹	12 / 15	ALL	3-8	9, 20
nanking cherry (<i>Prunus tomentosa</i>)	★★★		S	S	○	☹	10 / 10	ALL	2-7	7, 8, 9, 20
*chokecherry (<i>Prunus virginiana</i>)	★★	★	SF	SF	○	☹	15 / 15	ALL	2-5	7, 9, 20
*smooth sumac (<i>Rhus glabra</i>)	★★		W	S	○	☹	15 / 15	ALL	2-9	7, 9, 20
staghorn sumac (<i>Rhus typhina</i>)	★★		W	S	○ ●	☹	20 / 10	ALL	3-8	7, 9, 20
*arrowwood viburnum (<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>)	★★★	★	F	SF	○ ●	☹	12 / 12	ALL	2-8	7, 9, 22
nannyberry viburnum (<i>Viburnum lentago</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹	15 / 10	ALL	3-7	7, 9, 22
*blackhaw viburnum (<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>)	★★★	★	F	SF	○ ●	☹	15 / 15	ALL	3-9	7, 9, 22
*American cranberrybush (<i>Viburnum trilobum</i>)	★★	★	FW	SF	○ ●	☹	12 / 12	ALL	2-7	7, 8, 9, 22

SHORT SHRUBS (Nesting sites, food, cover near the ground)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
black chokeberry (<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>)	★★		FW	SF	○ ●	☹☹	5 / 5	ALL	3-8	7, 9, 20
red chokeberry (<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>)	★★		FW	SF	○ ●	☹☹	6 / 5	ALL	4-9	7, 9, 20
*redosier (redtwig) dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)	★★★	★★	SF	SF	○ ●	☹☹	8 / 10	ALL	2-7	7, 9
cranberry cotoneaster (<i>Cotoneaster apiculatus</i>)	★★★		F	SF	○ ●	☹	3 / 4	ALL	4-7	7, 9, 23
spreading cotoneaster (<i>Cotoneaster divaricatus</i>)	★★★		F	SF	○ ●	☹	6 / 7	ALL	4-7	7, 9, 23
*fragrant sumac (<i>Rhus aromatica</i>)	★★★	★	W	SF	○ ●	☹	6 / 6	ALL	3-9	7, 9

SHORT SHRUBS (Nesting sites, food, cover near the ground)

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Height/ Spread (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
Virginia rose (<i>Rosa virginiana</i>)	★★		W	SF	○	☹☹	5 / 5	ALL	3-7	7, 8, 9
*Woods rose (<i>Rosa woodsii</i>)	★		W	SF	○	☹	5 / 5	ALL	3-6	7, 8, 9
‡*American elder (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)	★	★★	S	SF	○●	☹	10 / 8	ALL	3-9	9, 17, 24
*common snowberry (<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○●●	☹	4 / 4	ALL	3-7	9
*western snowberry (<i>Symphoricarpos occidentalis</i>)	★	★	FW	SF	○●	☹	4 / 5	ALL	2-5	9, 20
*coralberry (<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i>)	★★		FW	SF	○●●	☹	3 / 5	ALL	2-7	9, 20

VINES AND VINE-LIKE PLANTS

Common Name ^a (Scientific Name)	Landscape Value ^b	Nest	Food	Cover	Sun Exposure ^c	Moisture Preference ^d	Size (feet)	NE ^e	Zone	Comments
*American bittersweet (<i>Celastrus scandens</i>)	★★	★	FW	SF	○●	☹	30†	ALL	4-8	9, 25
*trumpet honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>)	★★		SF	SF	●	☹	15	ALL	5-8	8, 26
*limber honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera dioica</i>)	★★		S	SF	○●	☹	10	ALL	2-4	9, 26
‡*Virginia creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>)	★★★	★	FW	SF	○●●	☹	30†	ALL	4-9	7, 27
‡*raspberry & blackberry (<i>Rubus</i> spp.)	★★	★	S	SFW	○●	☹	5 / 5	ALL	3-5	28
*wild grape (<i>Vitis</i> spp.)	★	★★	SF	SF	○	☹	40†	ALL	5-8	

†Height of the trellis or structure on which vines are planted tends to determine how high the vines will grow. Avoid planting vines to climb on buildings because they may damage wooden or brick siding or be difficult to remove.

NATIVE PRAIRIE PLANTS — Provide food and foraging and, in larger plantings, cover and nesting sites. Can be used as accent plantings or in small focus areas, perhaps surrounded by a rail fence or railroad ties. Many native prairie plants are available to consider; below are some favorites.

*Native Grasses - Common Name (Scientific Name)

big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)
 Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)
 little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
 sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)
 prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)
 buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*)
 blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*)

**Native Flowers - Common Name (Scientific Name)

purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
 pale purple coneflower (*E. pallida*)
 gray-head coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*)
 purple prairie-clover (*Dalea purpurea*)
 compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*)
 leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*)
 rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*)
 butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
 blue sage (*Salvia azurea*)
 blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*)

Resources

These publications provide additional details on plants, their growth patterns, and values for wildlife. These and other references were used in developing this publication and are good sources for additional information.

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