



Johnson's Garden Talk

Lawn and garden information for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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September 2005



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Rest Stop For Weary Travelers

Mike Hargrove, Johnson's West 13th Store Manager

Fall migration is getting underway and the birds in our backyards are getting ready for the change of seasons. Most insect and fruit eating birds are heading south for warmer climates where their food sources are available. Many of these travelers will make rest stops in your yard on their long trip if you have the right habitat. Water is the key ingredient for attracting migrating songbirds like warblers and vireos and if that water is moving it is all the more irresistible.

Birdbaths are an attraction for the birds needing to take a short break but a waterfall is like an oasis for migrating birds. Plants that provide fruit in the fall are another great attraction for those birds on their way south. The hawthorns, crabapples and junipers in my yard are a magnet for cedar waxwings, warblers and robins.

Several seed eating birds that raise their young in higher elevations or in the far north, spend their winters with us here in the plains. Many of the native sparrows make their winter home in Kansas. A sure sign that colder temperatures are on the way is the arrival of the first juncos (snowbirds) in the fall. A favorite winter sparrow in our area is the Harris sparrow that summers near the arctic circle but winters in the central plains of Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska. You can provide a ground-feeding tray and fill it with our "Pretty Boy Mix" to cater to these and other native sparrows that winter with us.

Most of our native birds do not migrate at all and stay with us year round. Some of them change their diet from insects to seeds or suet in the winter. Suet replaces insects in the winter for chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers and wrens. A wire suet feeder is a great attraction for these birds when the temperature is falling. If starlings become a problem when offering suet at your feeding station, there are starling resistant suet feeders available.

Fall is the traditional time people start filling their birdfeeders and adding new feeding stations. It can be frustrating when the birds do not immediately flock to your new feeder or just-filled birdbath. Keep in mind that in the fall there is an abundance of natural food available for wildlife and those food sources will be utilized until they are depleted or covered by snow or ice. People who feed the birds year round tend to have more birds in the fall than people who feed only in the winter. Remember that birds find food by sight and if they are not familiar with a new feeder it will take them time to accept it and start using it. Be patient and they will come.

As the leaves start to turn and the temperatures start to drop, keep an eye and ear out in your yard and enjoy those birds that are just passing through on their way south and say hello to those birds that will be spending the winter in your garden. ■