

More of the Best Winter Trees

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TREES FOR FOOD AND COVER FOR BIRDS

To survive freezing nights, many birds must gorge themselves each day with berries rich in fats and antioxidants. At night they seek shelter in tiny tree cavities or nestle among the branches of evergreens to keep warm.

The Eastern Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, is a long-lived, native evergreen that is just about perfect for over-wintering birds. Its fine evergreen needles provide cover and have a beautiful blue-green shade for garden interest. The female cedar produces blue berries that last well into March providing food all winter. In addition, there are nutritious wax-covered cones that cedar waxwings flock to for winter energy. A slow-growing, columnar tree, 40'-50'H x 10'-20', plant the eastern red cedar as a wind break on the north side of the property.

Another native tree that provides food and cover for birds is the **American Holly**, *Ilex opaca*. Rising 40'-50'H x 18'-40'W at maturity, this pyramidal shaped evergreen tree with pointy foliage is a mecca for wintering birds. It produces masses of outstanding red berries that persist from mid-autumn through early spring. It does equally well in full sun to part shade and tolerates well drained acidic to neutral pH soils. You must plant both a male and female within 300 feet of one another to produce berries. It does not tolerate humid conditions well and is not a good wind break as it suffers in windy conditions. However, it does well if pruned for shape in early winter just in time for holiday decorations.

Evergreens for Winter Interest and Wildlife

White Pine, *Pinus strobus*, is a needled evergreen tree with many attributes. A fast grower, rising 80'-100' H, the White Pine needs lots of space and makes a sturdy wind shield for larger lots. It supports 203 insects. Seeds from its long cylindrical cones nourish turkey, grouse, squirrels, and chipmunks. The first clutch of blue-birds feasts on the sawfly larvae that emerge on some needle bunches. The long blue-green needles house moth and butterfly larvae. Well suited to heavy snows its long flexible boughs shed snow without breaking. For a more interesting shape, 'Pendula', is a cultivar with twisted blue-green needles and has been called a living sculpture. Covered with snow, it can pass for a snowman.

Concolor or White Fir, *Abies concolor* is my favorite. It is a slow growing tree native to the western US. At maturity, it reaches 30'-50'H x 15'-20'W, good for mid-sized gardens. This fir is conical in shape with a straight trunk and silvery-gray needles that turn blue-green in summer while keeping a silvery undercoating. Its 3"-5" cones start out rosy red then turn a purple brown in winter and cluster in an upright position. The seeds are released in the autumn just as birds and mammals gorge on food for the winter.

Plant in full sun to part shade in a moist but well drained soil.

Trees add much to your garden design in every season. When planting trees for winter interest make sure that nothing blocks the view of a focal point tree from the house or curb. The interesting shape, texture and color of bark are more dominant in winter against the dullness of bare ground or the bright glow of a winter snow. Do add a tree that provides a focal point for your view and a home for our overwintering birds and small mammals.



American Holly
Ilex opaca



White fir
Abies concolor

Did You Know... these winter bird facts:

Shrubs that produce edible berries such as dogwood, holly, winterberry, beautyberry, staghorn sumac, and juniper are a great winter food source for birds and other wildlife because their high fat content.



These plants are also a pleasing addition to the winter landscape with the beautifully colored berries that last through the winter. Birds will take shelter in winter in various places such as: hollow trees, bird boxes, brush piles, and dense evergreen foliage.