

Commentary
For Immediate Release
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Of Plants, Birds and Bees

The first day of spring has arrived and it is time to consider the relationship between what we plant in our yards and fields and the pollinator species we rely on. Be it stunning butterflies, buzzing bees, or beautiful songbirds, they rely on the flowering species and trees we plant.

Every spring, songbirds migrate from their winter rest to breeding grounds in Vermont. They need a nutritious source of food for energy and habitat to raise their young. The most nutritious forms of plants are native species.

In the spring and summer, birds are looking for protein-rich insects to help them develop strong eggs and feed the demanding, growing chicks soon to hatch out of their eggs. Research shows that native plants house the most nutritious insects. Silky Dogwood, Red Oak, Speckled Alder, and Paper Birch have caterpillars, flies and spiders hiding in nooks and holes. Birds can eat these nutritious bugs and offer them to their chicks. The insects that are fed on by the birds don't find the same quality of food in the introduced, non-native plants like Burning Bush and Barberry. These species generally have hollow stalks and provide much less nutritional value.

In the fall, birds leave Vermont or pass through heading farther north. They are headed to their wintering grounds. Some of our tiny songbirds fly thousands of miles to find food, shelter and warmth in Central and South America. The Neotropical migrants, including black-throated blue warblers, yellow warblers and ovenbirds depend on fruits and berries with high fat content to give them energy for their all-night flights south. Researchers tested the lipid content of native and non-native berries and found that berries from native plants have many times higher fat content. Berries from dogwoods and arrowwood have excellent fat content. Fruit from Autumn Olive and Honeysuckle are a "bird junk food": it looks good, but contains empty calories. If the migrating birds fill up on the lower nutritional value non-native species, they might be unable to complete long distance flights to the next resting area.

To help birds and other pollinators, incorporate native plants into landscaping practices such as raingardens, butterfly gardens, riparian buffers and just planting them in your yard to provide habitat and color. We can create habitat that supports our native species. There is a risk that using non-native and invasive plants can create an "ecological dead-zone", which is useless to birds. Worse yet we could create an "ecological trap", or an area that looks good to birds, but when they try to live in the area become worn out and run down due to lack of adequate nutrients. Fortunately there are many sources of native plants in Vermont, one is the upcoming Winooski Tree & Shrub sale.

The Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District (WNRCD) hosts a annual tree, shrub and perennial sale as a service to residents of the District. We offer a wide selection of species for home,

garden, and conservation projects. We offer several species of locally sourced trees, shrubs and perennials. All proceeds from this fundraiser are used to develop and implement on-the-ground projects that protect our Natural Resources including; riparian and shoreline buffers, stormwater mitigation projects, fish habitat restoration, culvert replacements, and so much more.

Place your orders now for the Winooski NRCD's 34 th Annual Tree Sale. Visit the District's website for an order form and detailed information on the available selection at: www.winooskinrcd.org . In addition to a great selection of native plants, fruit trees, and berries, this year we will offer Brook Trout and Rainbow Trout to stock your private pond.

The Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District is one of 14 conservation districts throughout Vermont. It encompasses all of Chittenden and Washington County as well as parts of Orange County (Orange, Williamstown and Washington). The district relies on grants and individual donations to complete its conservation work. The WNRCD focuses its resources on completing conservation projects within the areas of agricultural assistance, forestland enhancement, urban conservation and watershed stewardship.

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