

# DO THE BIRDS BENEFIT FROM YOUR BACKYARD?

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It has been shown we need at least 70% native plants in our yard for nature to survive. When we garden, we tend to want showy, brightly colored, unique plants that may not be found in the areas around us. Garden centers fill their aisles with anything that is eye-catching, whether it is native or not. Many of the plants you will find at retailers are not from America and we have found that none of our insects can eat them or utilize them as their habitat. THAT is a big problem for nature. All of our bugs need native plants to live and without them we have fewer insects, butterflies and moths. That leads to fewer birds because they need those insects to eat and feed to their young for them to survive. What percentage of the plants in your yard are native? Do you know what they are?

What kind of native plants should you plant? Some of the most beneficial native plants are, in fact, trees. Oak trees support the most kind of butterflies and moths, but Willow, Cherry, Plum, Maple, Hickory, Hazelnut, Walnut and Beech trees are all equally beneficial, supporting over 100 different species of insects each! Certain butterflies prefer one tree over another and there is a great deal of information online to



help you decide which trees you may prefer to plant. The Zebra Swallowtail, for instance, will only feed on Pawpaw tree leaves as caterpillars. Some are less picky and will feed on several species. The Tiger Swallowtail caterpillar will feed on Tulip, Cottonwood, and Willow tree leaves.

Like nature, you should have layers or zones to your yard. There are several shrub type plants you

can add between your trees and around borders. Suggested are Serviceberry, Redbud (named the Martinsville City Tree), Spicebush, and American Plum.

In the understory of Indiana woods, there are a lot of native spring ephemerals, or wildflowers, that you can see including Mayapples, Trilliums, Trout lily, Rue-Anemone, Spring Beauty, Harbinger of Spring, Doll's Eyes, Bloodroot, Twinleaf, Wood Poppy, Dutchman's Breeches, and Squirrel corn. The list goes on and on. Many of these unique and beautiful native plants get overlooked and left out of nursery sales floors because they are easily obtained in nature, but their benefit greatly outweighs those non-native plants that are being sold and they are equally beautiful.

If you don't want a shady, tree-covered yard, you could put in a prairie planting to benefit the wildlife. It will take yearly work to keep the prairie planting as is and prevent trees and shrubs from trying to sneak into it. The land in Morgan County tends to naturally be woodland if not routinely managed. Most true prairies in Indiana are located in the Northwest part of the state. There are a lot of native plants that would do well in a Morgan County prairie, including several species of Asters, Goldenrods, Joe-Pye-Weed, Ironweed and Milkweed.

Take a closer look at native plants at [indiananativeplants.org/](http://indiananativeplants.org/).