



Backyard Wildlife



WILDLIFE HABITAT NOTES: Mast and Seed-Producing Plants

Hard mast, in the form of nuts and acorns, are significant foods in the fall and winter for deer, turkey, wood duck, mallard, gray and fox squirrels, ruffed grouse, bobwhite quail, black bear, raccoon and some of the larger birds such as blue jay and red-bellied woodpecker. Deciduous hardwood trees such as the oaks, hickories, black and black walnut, are an important long-term investment in food production for wildlife. Some oaks, while slow to mature, produce an acorn crop for up to 400 years! Since mast production varies tremendously from year to year and between species, planting a diversity of mast-producing species will guarantee a reliable food supply in all years.

Soft mast, such as the samaras produced by ashes, maples, and tulip poplar, are important foods for many songbirds and small mammals. Most often available in the spring and summer, soft mast is important for nesting birds as well as spring migrants, particularly the warblers. Leaf and flower buds can also be considered soft mast.

Seeds are often encased within berries or other edible fruits and eaten incidentally, but others are a principle food item. Seeds of pines and other conifers are used by many species of birds. The full value of seeds to particular wildlife species is not well known and deserves further study (a good project for students).

PLANT	FOOD TYPE	SEASONAL AVAILABILITY			WILDLIFE USE
		Summer	Fall	Winter	
<i>Overstory Trees</i>					
American Beech	nuts		X		many songbirds, turkey, woodpeckers
Arborvitae	seed		X	X	many songbirds, grouse, turkey
Ash (Blue, Green, White)	samara/seed		X	X	cardinal, evening grosbeak, purple finch, red-winged blackbird
Bald Cypress	seed		X	X	waterfowl
Basswood (American, White)	samara/seed		X	X	songbirds
Birch	catkins/seed	X	X	X	many songbirds, grouse, woodcock
Black Walnut	nut		X	X	squirrels
Cottonwood	seed	X	X		goldfinch, grosbeaks, herons, grouse
Eastern Hemlock	seed	X	X	X	chickadee, warblers, grosbeaks, thrushes, grouse
Elm (American, Slippery, Winged)	samara/seed	X			chickadee, nuthatch, red-bellied woodpecker Northern oriole, warblers, cardinal, finches
Hickory	nuts		X	X	squirrels, deer, small mammals
Magnolia (Big-leaf)	seed	X	X		vireos, red-bellied woodpecker, catbird, wood thrush, pileated woodpecker, cardinal*
Magnolia (Cucumber)	seed		X	X	see Big-leaf Magnolia
Maples (Red, Silver, Sugar)	samara/seed	X			purple finch, bobwhite, cardinal, goldfinch, red-bellied woodp., chickadee, song sparrow rosebeak, towhee, red-bellied woodpecker

PLANT	FOOD TYPE	SEASONAL AVAILABILITY			WILDLIFE USE
		Summer	Fall	Winter	
Oaks (many species)	acorns		X	X	squirrels, deer, blue jay, mourning dove, red-grosbeaks, titmouse, nuthatch, grackle
Pecan	nut		X	X	squirrels, deer, chipping sparrow
Pine	seed		X	X	squirrels, deer, other small mammals, chickadee, mourning dove, many other kinds of songbirds and woodpeckers
Sycamore	seed		X		orioles, cedar waxwings, chickadee, goldfinch, purple finch
Willow, Black	seed		X	X	unknown*

Understory Trees

Box Elder	samara/seed	X			see Maples
Chinkapin Chestnut	nuts		X	X	deer, squirrels, turkey
Hop Hornbeam	seed		X	X	mockingbird, cardinal, goldfinch, purple finch, rose-breasted grosbeak
Ironwood	seed		X	X	cardinal, goldfinch, grosbeak

Shrubs

Buttonbush	seed		X		waterfowl, marsh birds, shorebirds and small mammals
Common Alder	seed		X	X	mourning dove, mallard, green-winged teal, great blue heron, grouse, bobwhite, goldfinch
Hazelnut	nuts		X		turkey, grouse, quail, blue jay, crow, finches, deer, small mammals
Indigo Bush	seed		X	X	waterfowl, marsh birds, shorebirds, small mammals

Leadplant	seed		X	X	bobwhite, songbirds, small mammals
Locust, Bristly	seed		X	X	small mammals, bobwhite, towhee, grouse
Ninebark	seed		X	X	turkey, grouse, songbirds, small mammals
Pepperbush	seed		X	X	turkey, grouse, songbirds, small mammals
Rhododendron, Catawba	seed		X	X	turkey, grouse, songbirds, small mammals

Steeplebush	seed		X	X	waterbirds, songbirds, turkey, mammals
St. Johnswort	seed		X	X	many songbirds, quail, small mammals
Sumac	seed		X	X	bobwhite, turkey, grouse, bluebird, wood thrush, woodpeckers, catbird, robin, scarlet tanager, chickadee, mammals
Virginia Sweetspire	seed		X	X	waterbirds, songbirds, small mammals, turkey

*Willows are reported to have excellent value for butterflies and bees but their use by birds is apparently not well known.