

HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY**

This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

Write to Me!

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[Native Plant Profile: Highbush "Black" Huckleberry](#)

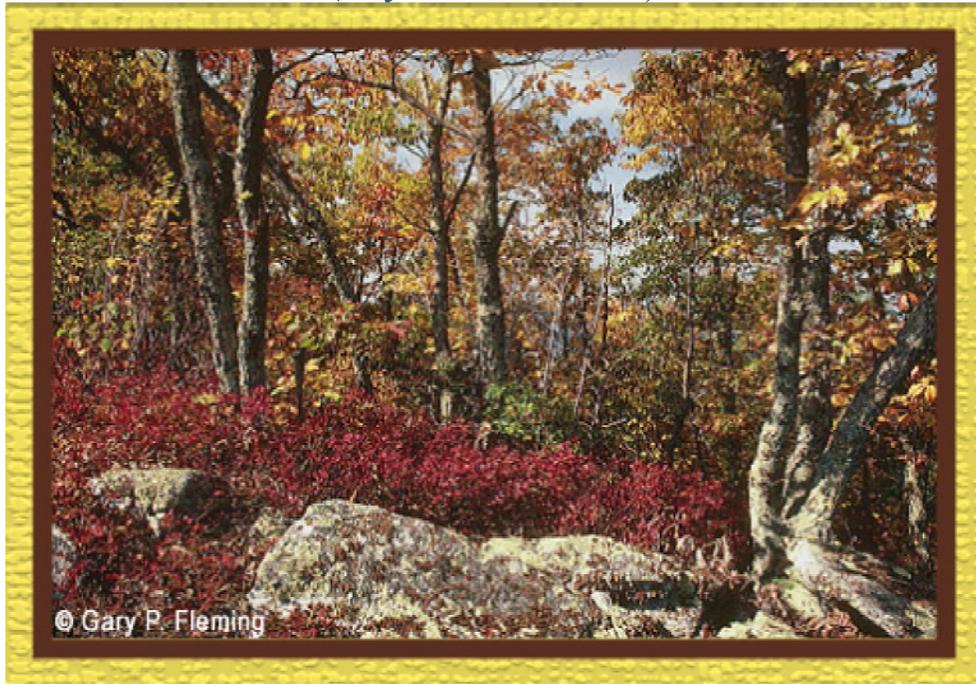
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Native Plant Profile... Highbush, "Black" Huckleberry
(*Gaylussacia baccata*)



**Stunning red fall foliage and sweet fruits provide landscape interest.
Great for naturalizing in woodlots and as a groundcover.**



Native Plant Profile: Grows three feet high, although averages about two feet, upright and much branched, spreading two to four feet. Occurs naturally in dry soils of meadows and forests, often with blueberries. Can form dense stands of undergrowth.

Flowers: Clusters of greenish to reddish white small (1/4 inch long) bell-shaped flowers that bloom from May to June.

Leaves: They are alternate, short-stalked and simple. Leaves are elliptical in shape with sharp-pointed tips. Underneath the leaf are small resin dots, which give the leaves a sticky feel to the touch.

Twigs and Bark: Twigs are slender reddish and hairy. Blueberries have warty specks on twigs; huckleberries do not.

Fruit: Shiny black, sometimes blue or blue with whitish cast, berries that are edible. Found from June to September. Blueberries have a large number of small seeds in their fruit, whereas Huckleberries have 10 seeds per fruit.

Landscape Notes: Stunning red fall foliage and sweet fruits provide landscape interest. Great for naturalizing in woodlots and as a groundcover. Does best with an acid pH in its soil and light shade to full sunlight. It is fairly trouble free from most pests.

Other Huckleberries: Box Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia brachycera*), Dwarf Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia dumosa*), Tall Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia frondosa*) all of these are found in eastern North America.

Huckleberries provide food for: Turkey, Ruffed grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Mourning Doves, Common Flicker, Red-Headed Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Great –crested Flycatcher, Blue Jay, Mockingbird, Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Orchard Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Rufous-sided Towhee, Black Bear, Gray Fox, Fox squirrel, Gray Squirrel, White-tailed deer.

Huckleberries provide larval food for: The Huckleberry Sphinx, (*Paonias astylus*). Henry's Elfin and the Brown Elfin will sometimes lay their eggs on the plant.

Huckleberries provide shelter for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Mourning Dove, Mockingbird, Catbird, American Robin, and Rufous-sided Towhee.

Huckleberries provide nesting places for: Mockingbird, Catbird, and American Robin.

Huckleberries serve as a nectar source for: Bumblebees and other native wild bees, which serve as the pollinating agents for the plant.



Planting for Wildlife with your Children



If families enjoy gardening, or just enjoy watching nature, it is a good chance that the children will too!

Fall is a good time to plant trees and shrubs for wildlife. Autumn planting follows the summer heat and precedes the cold of winter. Plant roots grow anytime soil temperatures are at least 40 degrees. A plant's root system can become established before spring arrives and can take full advantage of spring growth. Ball and burlapped trees and shrubs, if planted in the fall, have time to recover from transplanting.

Plan before you plant and include the children in this process. Try a native tree or shrub, which is already adapted to the growing conditions and the environment of the area. Have the children pick out the tree(s) or shrubs at the nursery. Prior to going the children may wish to check out the sun and soil conditions of the site to make sure what they are planting is appropriate for the area. Let them pick plants that appeal to their sight, feel and sense of smell. Giving the children ownership of the plants will create a desire in the to help care for the plant.



Let the children record the dates of planting and make predictions when the first leaves will appear on their plants in the spring. You might want to have the children take pictures of planting the trees, and then have them take pictures of the plants at least once a year to observe the growth. They might want to make a comparison of their growth to the trees.

Once the plants are established, you might want to make a craft project with your children from the leaves or twigs. Leaf prints are a good one to try. The Kansas City Public Library has a website describing how to Make a Leaf Print: <http://www.kckpl.lib.ks.us/YS/CRAfTs/Leafpmt.htm>

Research has found and continues to find that adults have positive attitudes towards wildlife and nature if they had positive childhood experiences planting for the environment.

Maryland Wildlife: White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)



This songbird, noted for its white throat patch and a yellow spot between the bill and eye, is a member of the sparrow family. It is also well known for its song of the late fall and winter which sounds like “Old Sam Peabody Peabody” or “Oh Sweet Canada, Canada” which both sexes sing. The distinct call song of “Tseet” which the bird sings when searching for other sparrows is a part of the sounds of autumn. The White-throated Sparrow is one native sparrow that may be found in the suburbs and urban areas in the fall and winter.

Range in Maryland: White-throated Sparrows migrate from the North to Maryland in late October and stay until late April to early May. These sparrows can sometimes be found in Garrett County Maryland other times of the year.

Description: Besides the distinctive white throat patch and yellow spot between the eye and bill, the bird is one of the larger sparrows - about 7” in length. Its tail is somewhat forked. The bill is blackish in color. Legs are pinkish.

Breast feathers are gray. A similar species, the White-crowned Sparrow, has a pink bill, and lacks the white throat and yellow face spot. These birds are polymorphic, meaning adults that have white brown and tan head stripes seem to always mate with those with black and white head stripes. Indiana State University has an excellent web site on this subject at <http://www.whitethroatedsparrow.org>

Habitat: White-throated Sparrows prefer open deciduous or mixed deciduous-evergreen woods, thickets, shrubs and brush piles in residential areas. Leafy ground within or near woods are key habitat requirements in the fall and winter.

Food Habits: These sparrows forage primarily on the ground. They prefer to scratch in leaves for insects and seeds. White-throated Sparrows are noted for their noisy scratching. They will come readily to bird feeders and also ground feed with a seed preference for sunflower and white millet. In the early spring these birds will also consume buds from shrubs and trees.

Additional Information: Although still found abundantly in its winter range the White-throated Sparrow is declining in its breeding range in the North. Juncos and White-throated Sparrows although different species occasionally mate! The hybrid bird looks like a grayish White-throated Sparrow with Junco-like tail feathers.



[Listen to the White-throated Sparrow](#)

Seed Preferences in Songbirds

Nearly 5,000 people in the mid 1990's turned their backyards through out North America into science labs. They spread a variety of birdseed out, then watched from their windows to see which food birds liked best: black-oil sunflower seed, white millet or red milo.

The Experiment

The mission of the experiment was to turn bird watchers into “[citizen scientists](#)”. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology based in Ithaca, New York coordinated the [Seed Preference Test](#) with support from the National Science Foundation.

Approximately a half a million birds visited squares of cardboard that served as bird feeders for the experiment. Data was gathered on the feeding habits of more than 30 different bird species.

Scientists had studied the food preferences of wild birds but in just a few locations. The Seed Preference Test was the first attempt to gather information on a vast geographic scale.

What did the Seed Preference Test find?

Birds that usually feed in trees – including American Gold finches, White –Breasted Nuthatches and House Finches seem to prefer sunflower seeds. Birds that are ground feeders –Juncos, Mourning Doves and many sparrow species, prefer millet. The birds that only live in western North American eat more milo than eastern species do.

The western preference for milo is interesting. Seed Preference Test data suggest that species such as Black Capped Chickadees and Mourning Doves show an East-West difference in eating habits. Western Chickadees and Mourning Doves ate less sunflower and more milo and millet than their eastern relatives. House Finches are another example of the East-West split. Eastern House Finches ate sunflower seed 85% of the time compared to 71% for Western House Finches.

These seed preference findings have left scientists with many interesting questions.

- Are Western birds generalized feeders?
- Why do Eastern birds show such a preference for black-oil sunflower seed?
- Could it even be that the habits of bird feeders are different enough in the regions of North America to influence the food birds chose?

Hopefully we will see additional research on these guides in the future.

**Here is some general information on the seed to use
in your bird feeding if you are located in the Eastern United States.**

Black Oil Sunflower



Study after study confirms that this seed is the most utilized seed at bird feeders. Black oil sunflower has a thin shell so all types of bird beaks easily break it. Its high oil, fat and protein content provide needed energy for wintertime birds.

Nyger* (Thistle)



This tiny black birdseed is usually grown in Africa and Asia. It is not the thistle that one sees growing along the roadside or abandoned fields. It is a preferred food for finches and Indigo Buntings (early Spring) with its high calorie value.

Safflower



This seed has high fat, protein and oil content. Cardinals will use it and it can be a solution to many squirrel problems at feeders. Grackles and Starlings are species that keep more desirable birds away. Putting out safflower seed is a way to reduce their numbers. It does take time for birds to adapt. As long as a month is not unusual. But once available Cardinals will seek it out. Finches and Grosbeaks will also use the seed.

Note: Corn and millet although eaten by a variety of birds will often attract grackles, starlings, pigeons and squirrels that will chase or crowd out more desirable songbirds.

**Remember, the best way to have songbirds in your backyard
is to plant trees and shrubs to provide year round food and cover.**

For additional information on Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Citizen Scientists, visit:
<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/LabPrograms/CitSci/WhatIsCitSci.html>

Acknowledgements:

- Photograph of Huckleberry shrub in meadow, courtesy of NPS, Photo by JR Douglass; 1970.
- Photograph of White-throated Sparrow courtesy of White-throated Sparrow courtesy of Ron Wolf, Calphotos. All rights reserved.
- Photograph of White-throated Sparrow courtesy of Pat Lynch, USGS Patuxent Bird Identification InfoCenter, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.
- Song of White-throated Sparrow courtesy of USGS Patuxent Bird Identification InfoCenter, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.
- Photograph of low shrub layer of Black Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) in autumn courtesy of Gary P. Fleming, Virginia Dept. of Conservation & Recreation.
- Photograph of Black Huckleberry in flower, courtesy of Kitty Kohout and the Wisconsin State Herbarium.
- Photograph of Black Huckleberry in fruit, courtesy of Robert W. Freckmann and the Wisconsin State Herbarium.
- Photograph of a student at Centreville Middle School planting a tree as part of an outdoor classroom being built on the school grounds, courtesy of Keith Weller, Natural Resource Conservation Service.
- Photograph of making leaf print, courtesy of the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library.

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature!

www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

In an effort to continue to provide quality backyard habitat information we are asking our readers to tell us what you think. Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. This will help us to improve our site so we can continue to deliver the information you want.

[Habichat Reader's Survey](#)

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Habichat, the newsletter for Maryland's Stewards of Backyard Wildlife, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

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