



Digging Deep - Gardening with Cynthia Brian

For the Birds

"I value my garden more for being full of blackbirds than of cherries, and very frankly give them fruit for their songs."
— Joseph Addison, essayist and poet (1672-1719)



A Lamorinda reader from Australia wanted to share her garden friend, the beautiful, friendly kookaburra with our readers.



Make sure to have a birdbath. Plant zinnias and other plants that birds will enjoy.

Are you attracting birds to your backyard? In the past few months, I have received numerous emails and calls from readers literally around the world asking questions about our flying friends. Many people have indicated that the bird population has increased in their landscaping, with some gardeners enjoying first-time visitors.

Robins, sparrows, hummingbirds, crows, red tailed hawks, quail, mourning doves, jays, owls, chickadees, wrens, bushtits, mockingbirds, thrashers, robins, yellow warblers, finches, larks, wrens, orioles, blackbirds, tanagers and many other species are calling Lamorinda home.

This past week I adopted a one-winged cockatiel named Spunky. He and I immediately bonded as he spawned the impetus to write about the benefits of birds. Although I'm a novice at identifying many of these wonderful creatures, birds have always fascinated and entertained me as I've watched quail with their newly hatched covey convening on my lawn, or the robins annually laying eggs in the wreath on my back door. This year the airspace around my home is particularly jammed with crows cawing. I thought I was experiencing a re-make of "The Birds" recently when a convention of turkey vultures and crows assembled on my rooftop. I snapped a photo of two before jumping into my car for safety as 20 other buzzards landed.

How long have birds been on the planet? In 1859 Bavaria fossils were found dating to 140 million years ago that suggested that modern birds evolved from a feathered ancestor, Archaeopteryx, similar to a dinosaur. The size of a crow, Archaeopteryx is the probable ancestor of over 9,000 species of birds.

The appeal of birds in our backyards is immeasurable. While watching their antics and enjoying their beautiful plumage as well as their melodious song is intriguing, the grand dividend for gardeners is their free assistance as garden helpers. Birds are constantly turning over leaves, scratching in mulch, or flitting from bush to tree finding their meal of insects we never see. Birds such as flycatchers and swallows decimate flying pests. Seed-eating birds will glean 95 percent of the weed seed that grows every season. When we welcome birds to our backyards, we are creating a home landscape that will naturally ward off diseases and pests. Bacteria and spores struggle to survive as our gardens become more organic creating a natural balance between pests and plants. ... continued on page D14



A favorite birdhouse Photos Cynthia Brian



This is a cozy and safe nesting place for our feathered friends.