

Birding—It's as Close as Your Backyard

Unlike most hobbies, backyard birding doesn't cost a lot, doesn't entail sitting in those tiny airplane seats for hours, and doesn't require that you decipher complicated instructions just to get started. All you need is a backyard—or a balcony.

It's no wonder so many Americans—over 60 million—are interested in birding. Learning about birds is great exercise for your brain too. Imagine: there are over 60 species of warblers, and that's just in North America. Whether you live on the West Coast or along the Panhandle, there are dozens of species you can observe...if you have the right drawing cards. But be prepared: the birds in your neighborhood, from Western bluebirds to Red-Eyed Vireos, can capture your interest and turn you into a binocular-wielding birder in no time.



Many birds are accustomed to living near people, so it's pretty easy to catch a glimpse of several species right near your home. And that's without making any effort. But everyone loves an invitation, even those who just fly by. Entice more of them into your yard with just a few changes.

1. First, try putting up a bird feeder. Most bird feeders attract a variety of birds, and you'll love seeing them flit past your windows. To get started, watch this video on birding basics: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FHzoaDd2K8.
2. Choose the kind of birdseed that will attract a lot of birds. Black oil sunflower seeds, which you can pick up just about anywhere, work well. Depending on where you live, you'll have cardinals, chickadees and maybe even some showy gold finches stopping by for a quick snack.
3. Get a bird guidebook—or a smartphone app. You'll be amazed at how easy it is to identify dozens of visitors to your yard in just a few weeks. There are over 1,000 species of birds in the United States, but bird guides can steer you toward those you're most likely to see in your region.
4. Think about growing some plants and flowers that attract birds. Trees and shrubs can provide shelter from predators and great places for nests. June berries and dogwoods offer edible treats for many species and attract insects that birds like. To attract a particular species, learn what they like: bee balm and trumpet creeper vines, for instance, are great draws for hummingbirds.
5. Bird baths offer clean drinking water and a chance to have a good overall rinse. By bathing, birds keep their feathers clean and flexible. Just be sure to clean your bird bath regularly; knowing that they will find a healthy drinking source they can also bathe in will keep your feathered buddies coming back again and again. Best of all, today's bird baths come in fun new designs, so add some glamour to the bird photos you'll soon start taking.
6. Look into putting up a bird house. Most bird houses are designed for a specific type of bird, so do a little research—and then put out the “vacancy” sign. Chances are, it will be quickly filled.

Finally, get out your camera—preferably with a zoom lens. Or just enjoy the view through binoculars. Seeing these birds up close can be a real thrill, especially once you begin to recognize details, like a tuft

on the head or a split tail. To bring birds even closer, consider a window feeder from Perky-Pet®:
www.birdfeeders.com/store/wild-bird-feeders/hopper/window. Bird watching is even safe up close!