

How to create a wildlife-friendly garden

Feature	Notes
Leaf litter	Areas of the garden which are not raked, but allowed to compost, creating mulch that supports invertebrates (worms, isopods, wētā) to feed ground-foraging birds.
Vertical complexity	Tree canopy, mid-storey, understorey. Many birds use one part of the canopy to perch in (to avoid predators) and another to forage in. Birds will feel safer if there is a layering of heights in the vegetation.
Water	Water is best placed away from ground cover that might shelter predators.
Open spaces	Some species, such as swallows, like to forage over open grass or water. Interspersing open spaces with closed areas will provide an attractive mix of foraging opportunities.
Trees that fruit and flower throughout the year	The garden will be more attractive to birds if there is food all year round, especially for birds that learn about the location and make it part of their foraging rounds.
Shelter	Dense or spiny plants (which do not have to be in prominent positions) will protect birds physically. They need to be in sufficient abundance to provide shelter for the birds that live there.
Patches	Beds of plants that provide food and shelter work better than individual plants. This is because passing birds might not notice a single plant, and even if they do, they will not stay because the resource is not sufficient to attract and maintain individuals, pairs, or flocks.
Density	Dense plantings are better for birds than sparse ones. However, it is possible to have non-traditional or minimalist spaces against a dense but unobtrusive background, which would serve birds well and still maintain a modern aesthetic.
Scale	Think of working with neighbours. A 'bird's perspective' is useful. Many birds travel some distance and sample several more or less habitual areas.
Native versus exotic species	There are many reasons for growing natives. If they are locally sourced, they are already adapted to the local climate. They can be easier to propagate and local birds will recognise them as a resource. However, many exotic species, such as banksia, grevillea, and protea, also provide abundant nectar, and local species can learn to use them. As long as they do not become environmental weeds, they can be usefully added to a garden that supports bird life.