

## Bringing the Birds Home: Plants That Attract Birds to Your Suburban Garden

Imagine waking up to the cheerful chirps of sunbirds, weavers, or white-eyes just outside your window. Creating a bird-friendly garden isn't just about putting out a feeder—it starts with planting the right things. If you live in a suburban area and dream of turning your backyard into a bird paradise, the good news is: it's totally doable. And no, you don't need a massive garden or a landscape designer. A little planning, a bit of planting, and a splash of patience go a long way.

So, what plants should you add to your garden if you want to roll out the green carpet for your feathered friends? Let's dive in.

### Why Native Plants Are the MVPs

First up, native plants. These are the unsung heroes of bird gardening. Why? Because birds already know and love them. Native plants have evolved alongside local bird species, which means they offer the food, shelter, and nesting materials that birds instinctively look for. Plus, they're generally easier to grow, more drought-tolerant, and less prone to pests. Win-win.

Think aloes, wild dagga (*Leonotis leonurus*), and Cape honeysuckle (*Tecomaria capensis*). These flowering plants are a magnet for nectar-feeders like sunbirds and white-eyes. Plus, they add vibrant colour to your garden.

### Plants That Serve Up a Buffet

If you want to attract a variety of birds, aim to offer different types of food: nectar, fruit, seeds, and insects (yes, plants can attract insects, and that's a good thing!). Here are some bird-approved plant picks:

#### 1. Nectar-rich plants

- **Aloes:** These are sunbird favourites, especially during winter when other food is scarce.
- **Cape honeysuckle:** A fast grower with trumpet-shaped flowers, beloved by nectar-feeding birds.
- **Coral tree (*Erythrina lysistemon*):** Tall and dramatic, its red flowers are irresistible to sunbirds.

#### 2. Fruiting plants

- **Wild olive (*Olea europaea subsp. africana*):** Its small fruits are devoured by bulbuls, mousebirds, and starlings.
- **Num-num (*Carissa macrocarpa*):** This tough shrub offers fruit for birds and juicy red berries for us humans, too.
- **Kei apple (*Dovyalis caffra*):** Spiky and dense, it not only feeds birds but also gives them safe shelter.

### 3. Seed producers

- **Wild grasses:** Let part of your lawn go wild with indigenous grasses—great for weavers and waxbills.
- **Sunflowers:** Grow some of these and you'll have a front-row seat to seed-eating birds going nuts (literally).
- **Spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*):** It may not produce seeds like sunflowers, but it draws in insects that insectivorous birds love to snack on.

### Think Beyond Food

While food is a major drawcard, birds also need places to hide, nest, and rest. Dense shrubs and thorny plants give smaller birds safe places to escape from predators and harsh weather.

Planting a mix of heights—from ground covers to mid-level shrubs and taller trees—helps mimic the layers of natural habitats. This creates micro-environments that suit different species. For example, doves might prefer ground foraging while sunbirds love mid-level nectar spots, and barbets or woodpeckers hang out in taller trees.

### Keep It Wild(ish)

One of the best things you can do? Relax a bit on the manicuring. A too-tidy garden with perfectly trimmed hedges and spotless paths isn't very inviting to birds. Leave a patch or two a little untamed. Let the seed heads stay a bit longer. Skip a mow now and then. All these "imperfections" make your garden more welcoming.

And if you want to take it a step further, add in a water source like a shallow birdbath or even a small pond. Birds need water for drinking and bathing, and a little splash zone can quickly become the local bird hotspot.

### Start Small, Think Big

Don't feel pressured to transform your entire garden overnight. Start with a corner, add a few bird-friendly plants, and see what happens. Keep a notebook or snap photos to track the birds that visit. Over time, you'll learn what works best in your space.

Before long, you might find your garden buzzing and fluttering with life. And the best part? You're not just making your own little sanctuary—you're creating a stepping stone for birds to thrive in the increasingly paved-over suburban landscape.

So go ahead, dig a hole, plant a shrub, and watch the magic unfold. Your local birds will thank you—and reward you with a front-row seat to nature, right outside your door.