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- 6** *Stunning* **HYDRANGEAS**





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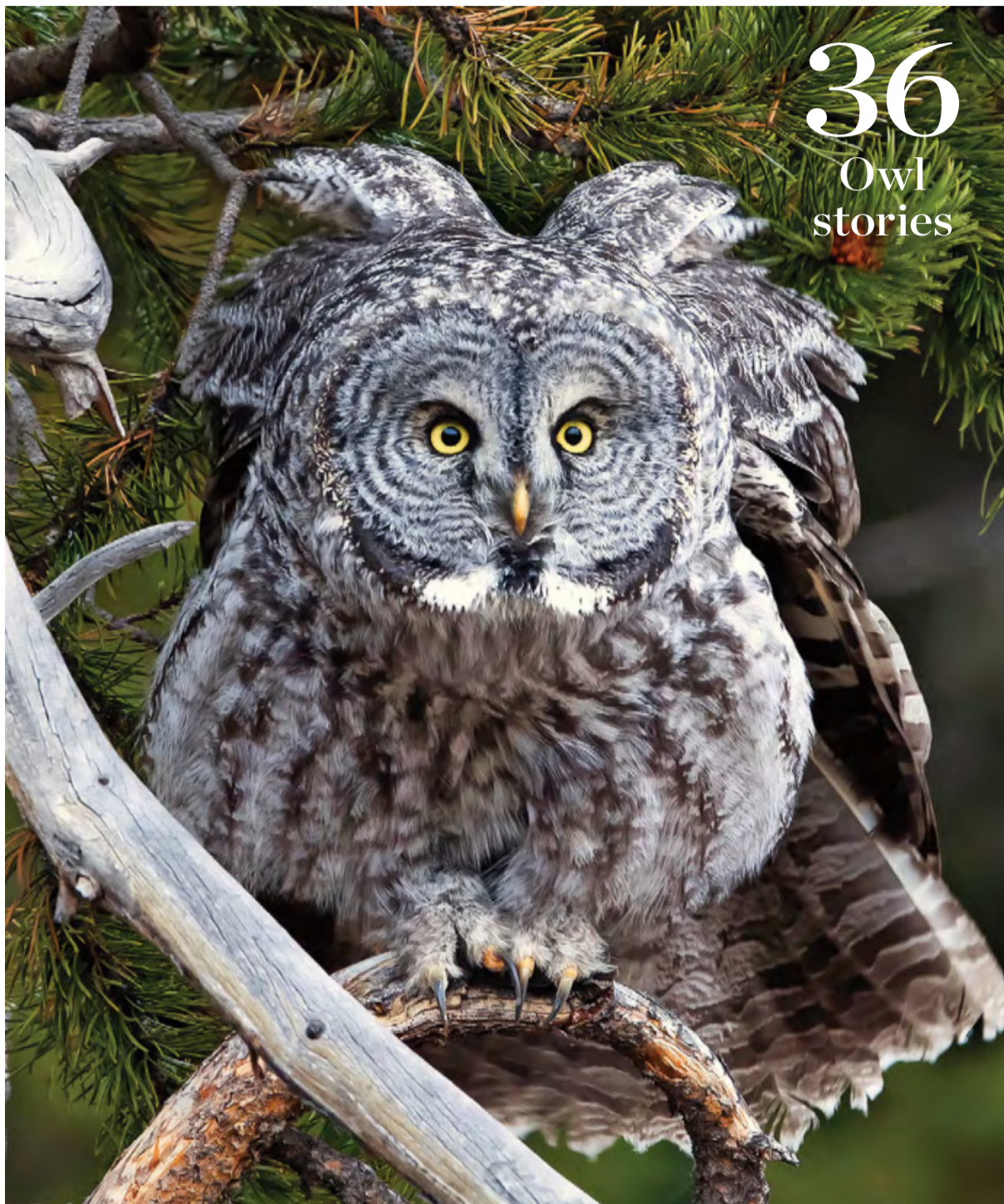
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# On the Prowl for Owls

I can probably count on two hands the number of times I've seen an owl—not including the snowies that frequent my area most winters. I respect that owls are elusive and wary and prefer to hang out in



the shadows, so I don't usually seek them out as I do with colorful, boisterous warblers, for example, that seem to beg for attention and adore the spotlight. Unlike those showy birds, owls quite literally blend into the landscape, and surely I've been among them and simply not realized it.

Although nocturnal, owls are occasionally spotted during the day. In "Out & About Owls" on page 36, readers share some truly amazing snapshots of lucky daytime owl sightings. I am especially jealous of Timothy Carroll's adorable photo of four fledgling screech-owls—see it on page 40. You'll also find interesting owl tidbits, specifically about their daytime behaviors, sprinkled throughout that story.

Also in this issue, learn about 10 bulbs you should buy now and get in the ground before it freezes. In "Invest in Next Spring" on page 10, we show you beautiful flowers that could adorn your garden next spring if you plant them soon. And if you need a quick tulip-planting refresher, turn to "Bulb Basics" on page 18.

Whether you're searching for owls or busy in the garden, I hope you have a spectacular autumn season.

*Kirsten*

KIRSTEN SCHRADER, CONTENT DIRECTOR



## NATURE SECRETS

Read fun and interesting tidbits about the creatures lurking in your backyard (and beyond!) in our new book *Everyday Nature*

*Secrets 2022*. Get a copy for \$10 plus free shipping at [birdsandblooms.com/NSON](https://birdsandblooms.com/NSON).

## SUET SEASON

When making suet, start with equal parts lard and peanut butter. Add safe ingredients such as dried fruit, rolled oats, birdseed, cornmeal and flour. Avoid bread, sugar, leftovers, meat, bacon fat and salted nuts.



## TO THE RESCUE!

One frigid fall day, my son Charlie found a bee that he thought was too cold to fly. He cupped his hands around it and blew some hot air. The bee started flapping its wings and gave Charlie a "bee high five" before flying away.

**Jennifer Bush** DERRY, PENNSYLVANIA





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# CBD FOR YOUR PAIN

*Everyone feels the hurt as you age, but CBD can help you deal with it*

**By: Beth Giles**

**L**ife really does fly by. Before I knew it, my 60s had arrived, and with them came some new gifts from dear ol' Mother Nature—frequent knee pain, stress, low energy and sleeplessness. Now, I'm a realist about these things, I knew I wasn't going to be young and springy forever. But still, with "golden years" nearly on my doorstep, I couldn't help but feel a little cheated. That is until I found my own secret weapon. Another gift from Mother Nature.

It began a few months back when I was complaining about my aches and pains to my marathon-running granddaughter, Jen. She casually mentioned how she uses CBD rub to help with her joint pain. She said that CBD gave her more focus and clarity throughout the day and that her lingering muscle and joint discomfort no longer bothered her. She even felt comfortable signing up for back-to-back marathons two weekends in a row this year. That made even this self-proclaimed skeptic take notice.

But I still had some concerns. According to one study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 70% of CBD products didn't contain the amount of CBD stated on their labels.

And, as a consumer, that's terrifying!

If I was going to try CBD, I needed to trust the source through and through. My two-fold research process naturally led me to Zebra CBD.

First, I started calling my family and friends. Call me old fashioned but I wanted to know if there were people whom I trusted (more than anonymous testimonials) who've had success using CBD besides my granddaughter.

Secondly, I wanted cold hard facts. Diving deep into the world of CBD research and clinical studies, I came across Emily Gray M.D., a physician at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) Medical School and medical advisor to Zebra CBD who is researching the effects of CBD. Dr. Gray wrote "early results with CBD have been promising and we have a lot of research underway now. I've had several patients using CBD with good success. It's important that you know your source of CBD and how to use it properly."

After hearing it from the doctor's mouth, I returned to my research, asking more people and was amazed by the number of close friends and family who were already on the CBD train. Apparently, I was the only one without a clue! And funny enough, a couple of

friends who commented were using the same brand as my granddaughter—Zebra CBD. There was no consensus as to why they were using CBD, but the top reasons given were for muscle & joint discomfort, mood support, sleep support, stress and headaches, as well as supporting overall health & wellness.

Eventually, even the most skeptical of the bunch can be won over. With a trusted CBD source in mind, I decided to give it a go.

When I viewed Zebra CBD's selection online, I was impressed by its array of products, including CBD oils called tinctures, topicals, chewable tablets, mints and gummies. After reading on their website that all their products are made with organically-grown hemp, I ordered... and it arrived within 2 days!

The first product I tried was the Rub. Now this stuff was strong. Immediately after rubbing it on my knee, the soothing effects kicked in. It had that familiar menthol cooling effect, which I personally find very relieving. And the best part is, after two weeks of using it, my knee pain no longer affected my daily mobility.

The Zebra Sleep Gummies, on the other hand, had a different but equally positive effect on my body. To take it, the instructions suggest chewing thoroughly. This was simple enough, and the taste was, well, lemony. After about 15 minutes, a sense of calm came over my body. It's hard to describe exactly; it's definitely not a "high" feeling. It's more like an overall sense of relaxation—and then I fell fast asleep. Needless to say, I slept great and woke up refreshed. I haven't slept like that in a long time.

While it hasn't been a catch-all fix to every one of my health issues, it has eased the level and frequency of my aches. And it sure doesn't seem like a coincidence how rejuvenated I feel.

All-in-all, CBD is one of those things that you have to try for yourself. Although I was skeptical at first, I can safely say that I'm now a Zebra CBD fan and that I highly recommend their products.

Also, I managed to speak with a Zebra CBD spokesperson willing to provide an exclusive. If you order this month, you'll receive \$10 off your first order by using promo code "**BB10**" at checkout. Plus, the company offers a 100% No-Hassle, Money-Back Guarantee. You can try it yourself and order Zebra CBD at [ZebraCBD.com/BB](https://ZebraCBD.com/BB) or at 1-888-762-2699.



# Color Blast

*This new shrub brings fresh hues to the fall landscape.*



PROVEN WINNERS COLORCHOICE FLOWERING SHRUBS

## PLANT PERK

In fall, berries in shades of blue and pink dot Brandywine viburnum. The different colored fruits are even found within the same clusters, shown here.

## Brandywine Viburnum

*Viburnum nudum* 'Bulk',  
Zones 5 to 9

Move over fiery autumn hues—this Brandywine viburnum shrub is stealing the spotlight with its unmatched colorful berry clusters. For the best fruit production, avoid too much pruning after flowering.

**Attracts:** 🐦 🦋

**Light needs:** Full sun to part shade.

**Size:** 5 to 6 feet tall and wide.

**Grown for:** Fall color.

**Foliage:** Dark red or maroon leaves in autumn.

**Flowers:** Fragrant white blooms in spring.

**Benefit:** It's self-pollinating, so you only need one plant to get berries.





Male yellow-bellied  
sapsucker



# Sap Tappers

*Listen for drumming as the yellow-bellied sapsucker looks for sweet treats in the trees.*

BY KEN KEFFER

**S**apsuckers are a group of specialized woodpeckers that tap out row after row of individual sap wells in tree trunks. The yellow-bellied sapsucker is seen in the eastern half of the U.S. and across the northern forests, while the red-naped, Williamson's and red-breasted are the species of the West.

Licia Kuckkahn Johnson, education director and naturalist at the North Lakeland Discovery Center in Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, remembers seeing her first yellow-bellied sapsucker and thinking that it didn't look very yellow to her. But she was particularly excited when she was able to identify their sap wells for the first time.

"After 20 years of teaching, I still love asking folks what they think made those crazy patterns on the trees," she says.

## Standing Out

Vertical white wing patches distinguish yellow-bellieds from similar black-and-white downy and hairy woodpeckers. According to Licia, the full red forehead helps with identification. She also says, "If a bird has a red throat, you know right away it is a male, and if the throat is white, you are looking at a female sapsucker."

Young yellow-bellieds have a brownish coloration, but their white wing patches, like those of the adults, are still a useful field mark to look for.

## On the Move

These sapsuckers are migratory, which is a fairly rare trait for woodpeckers. They live in a variety of habitats, from low-lying floodplains to mountainous forests at 10,000 feet.

Their breeding range extends from Alaska to Newfoundland and south along the Appalachians. They winter across the East from New Jersey west to Texas and all the way south to Panama.

Male yellow-bellied sapsuckers drum out slow Morse code-like territory notes. A common breeding display involves males pointing their bills skyward as they showcase their red throat patch for an interested female. Though both sexes are involved with excavating nesting cavities, males maintain most of the workload.

## Sweet Snacks

Yellow-bellied sapsuckers often feed from trees in young deciduous or mixed forest stands. During the springtime, flowing sap wells provide nourishment to the sapsuckers as well as insects, bats and other birds, including ruby-throated hummingbirds.

Sapsuckers also snack on insects they glean from tree trunks or catch out of the air. Native berries round out the bird's diet, and yellow-bellieds will occasionally stop by for suet. Consider growing fruit-producing plants, and keep an eye on your suet feeder to see if they visit your backyard.



Juvenile yellow-bellied sapsucker

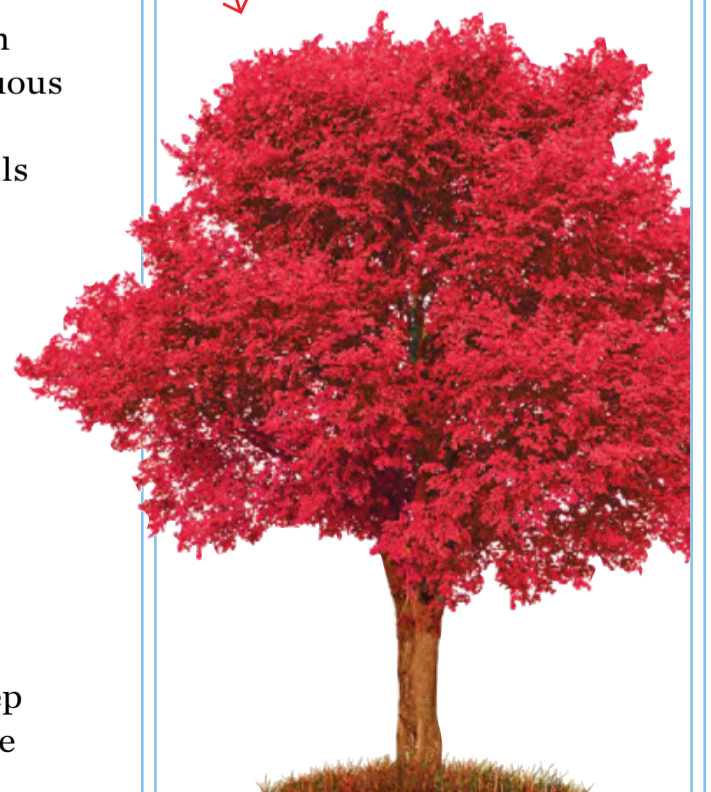
## SQUEAKY SOUNDS

Yellow-bellied sapsucker calls are a repeated series of nasally mewling sounds. Licia Kuckkahn Johnson says the noise resembles a raspy, squeaky dog toy being chewed on over and over.

## TOP TREES

Sapsuckers visit hundreds of trees, but here are some of their favorites:

Aspen  
Eastern hemlock  
Elm  
Paper birch  
Red hickory  
Sugar maple  
Yellow birch





TOP 10

# Invest in Next Spring

*Plant these bulbs in fall for carpets of color the following year.*

BY EVA MONHEIM

1







### 1 Winter aconite

*ERANTHIS HYEMALIS*,  
ZONES 4 TO 7

Tough and resilient, winter aconites provide brilliant yellow morsels of joy in the garden as they begin to awaken around March in many areas. The tubers multiply over time, providing even more brilliant color. The low, buttercuplike flower's frilly green collar accents the yellow petals. Full to part sun is ideal.

**Why we love it:** This low-grower shines along pathways, is exceptionally deer resistant, and can even grow under black walnut trees.

### 2 Camas

*CAMASSIA LEICHTLINII* SSP.  
*SUKSDORFII*, ZONES 5 TO 9

Lovely stalks of blue-purple star-shaped flowers grow up to 4 feet tall and bloom from April to May. Camas plants tolerate a range of soils from clay to wet or dry ground, and work well in rain gardens. The flowers come in an array of colors, including white, purple, blue and cream. The yellow anthers make flower petals pop.

**Why we love it:** Camas is native to the western U.S., and bees appreciate the pollen in late spring.



### 3 Pagoda trout lily

*ERYTHRONIUM CALIFORNICUM*, ZONES 3 TO 9

Pagoda is one of the largest trout lilies, standing up to a foot tall. With sulfur yellow flowers, it brightens partly shaded gardens, and deer and rabbits leave it alone. This lily goes dormant after blooming, so plant it among perennials that start to shine in early summer.

**Why we love it:** In addition to the bright flowers, the plant's leaves are a glossy green, sporting bronze and maroon markings that fade later in the season.

**CONTINUED COLOR** *Many of these plants lose interest in summer. Grow ground covers, such as yellowroot shrubs, ostrich ferns or hostas, around the bulbs to disguise their wilted stems and leaves. The ground covers' foliage keeps plots lush and green.*



### 4 Siberian squill

*SCILLA SIBERICA*, ZONES 2 TO 8

Small clusters of brilliant blue flowers grow on stems accompanied by long strappy leaves. Their nodding heads look like a wave across the garden during a spring breeze. Do not plant Siberian squill in the Great Lakes region or the Northeast, where it's invasive.

**Why we love it:** Siberian squill looks fantastic clustered around a tree and is hardy in very cold areas.



## TOP 10



### 5 Persian lily

*FRITILLARIA PERSICA*,  
ZONES 4 TO 8

From mid-to-late spring Persian lily puts on quite a show with its flowers, which range from deep purple to cream. The flowers can tower over the garden, maxing out at 3 feet tall. They prefer well-draining soil and full sun to part shade. Each stalk holds dozens of blossoms. It's an excellent cut flower, adding drama to bouquets.

#### Why we love it:

Persian lily adapts to varying soils, as long as they're well-draining.



### 6 Gravetye Giant summer snowflake

*LEUCOJUM AESTIVUM*,  
ZONES 4 TO 8

Growing a little over 2 feet tall once they're established, Gravetye Giant features deep green, grasslike leaves and white, bell-shaped flowers with a green marking on the tip of each petal. It naturalizes in full sun or part shade, and the flowers smell slightly like chocolate.

**Why we love it:** You can plant it in a range of soils, including clay. The bulbs are resistant to disease in well-draining soil.



### 7 Glory of the snow

*CHIONODOXA LUCILIAE*, ZONES 3 TO 8

This diminutive plant stands 4 to 6 inches tall with blooms in purple, blue or sometimes pink with a white center. It covers the ground from March to April, depending on your location, and does well in snow. The plants fade quickly after the initial bloom, but come back year after year with the right care.

**Why we love it:** Glory of the snow grows under black walnut trees, deer don't seem to care for it, and it makes lovely small flower arrangements in early spring.

**TANTALIZING TULIPS** Available in a plethora of shapes and colors, tulips are a pretty addition to any garden. Like the other bloomers on this list, put them in the ground in fall for a bounty of spring hues. Go to page 18 for our best autumn planting tips.



### 8 Spring starflower

*IPHEION SPECIES*, ZONES 5 TO 9

The shape of the blooms is the best way to identify this plant, also known as springstar. The flowers exude a spicy fragrance and the leaves smell like garlic when crushed. Stems grow 6 inches tall in full sun and tolerate some shade. They look right at home in rock and woodland gardens.

**Why we love it:** Bees and other early pollinators are attracted to the plant.



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**9 Spanish bluebell**

*HYACINTHOIDES HISPANICA*, ZONES 3 TO 8

Spanish bluebell varieties come in shades of blue, pink and white with deep green foliage accentuating the 1-to-2-foot-tall flower stalks. Plant bulbs in part sun to part shade for the best results, but it also grows in full sun or full shade.

**Why we love it:**

Pollinators can't get enough and it's a fantastic transitional bulb to bridge late spring and summer.

**BEST BULBS THAT BLOOM IN SUMMER AND FALL**

- Autumn crocus
- Blazing star
- Calla lily
- Canna lily
- Crocosmia
- Gladiolus
- Stargazer oriental lily
- Surprise lily



**10 Windflower**

*ANEMONE BLANDA*, ZONES 5 TO 8

Windflowers are an excellent ground cover, and can be found in blue-purple, white and pink varieties. The lobed leaves add beautiful textured interest. You can also plant the tubers in pots mixed with other bulbs and perennials.

**Why we love it:** The plant features charming 8-inch-tall daisylike flowers and is disease and pest resistant.

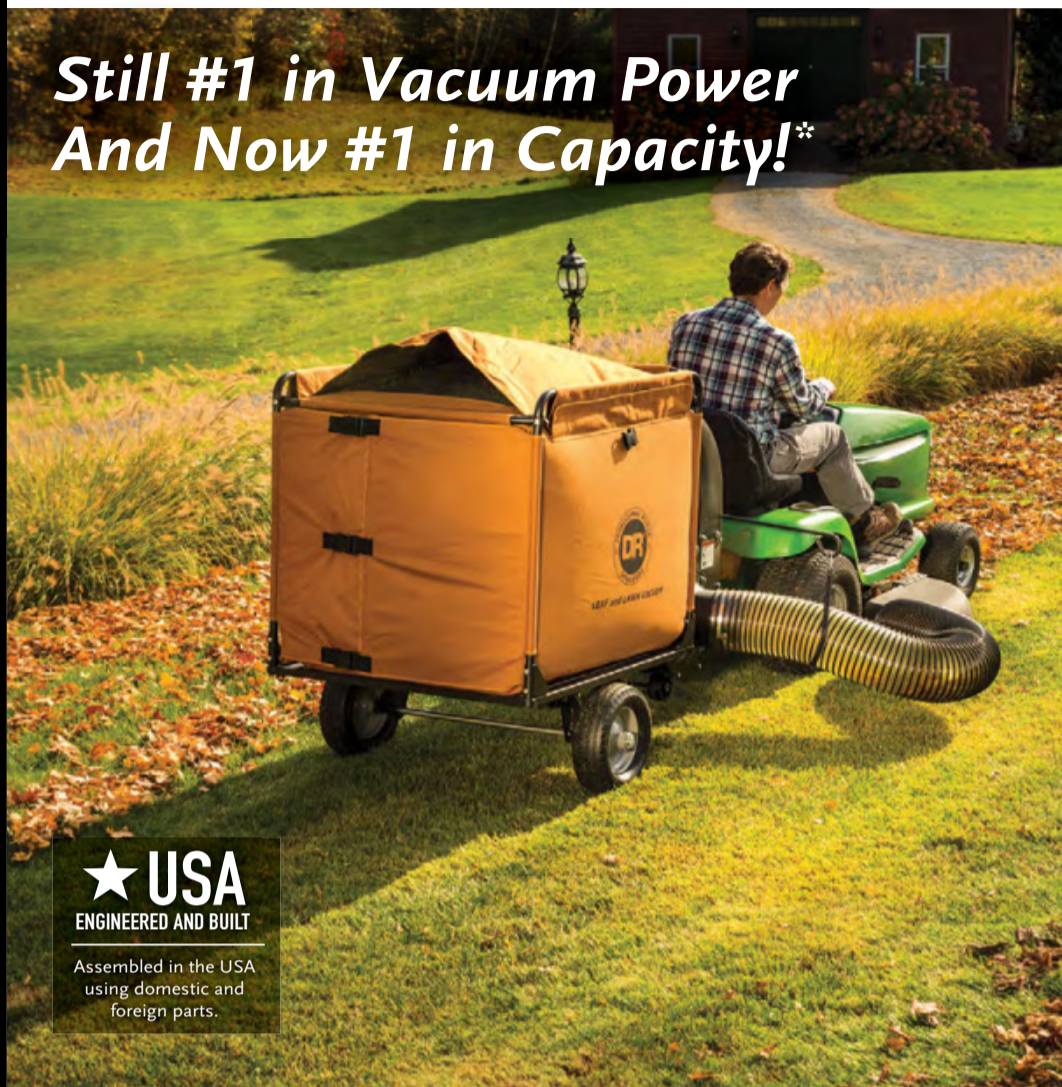
*Eva Monheim is a garden coach who encourages clients to plant bulbs to break up the doldrums of late winter. She says to plant numerous species for extended color through spring.*





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# Best-in-Show Hydrangeas

*These champs offer up the classic shrub's most impressive attributes.* **BY JILL STAAKE**



Above: Limelight Prime hydrangea



Above: Incrediball hydrangea  
Right: Let's Dance Can Do! hydrangea



**A** hydrangea in full bloom can stop you in your tracks—and fall is the perfect time to plant these stunners. They thrive in almost any garden, according to Miranda Niemiec, a horticulture content specialist at *hydrangea.com*. She says “You only need to know two things to be successful with hydrangeas: what type you have and whether it blooms on old or new wood.”

Bigleaf, mountain, oakleaf and climbing hydrangeas all bloom on old wood. If you must prune them, do it sparingly. Panicle and smooth hydrangeas flower on new wood. Give them a light trim in late winter or early spring to encourage even more flowers.

Now that you know the secret to success, all you need to do is pick the right plant. These cultivars boast some of hydrangea's best attributes.

## **COLD-WEATHER WARRIOR**

*Limelight Prime panicle hydrangea*  
“Panicle hydrangeas are the best for cold climates, even down to Zone 3,” Miranda says. She explains that panicles bloom on new wood,





Left: Gatsby Pink hydrangea  
Below: Tiny Tuff Stuff hydrangea



Above: Let's Dance Big Band hydrangea

which grows only after cold winter temperatures have passed. They bloom earlier in the summer and flowers boast stunning fall colors.

**HANDLES SOUTHERN HEAT**

*Let's Dance Can Do! bigleaf hydrangea*  
Long hot summers are challenging for some hydrangeas, but panicle, oakleaf and bigleaf varieties usually tolerate the heat—and Let's Dance Can Do! is no exception. "It is a reblooming hydrangea that sets more flower buds than any other," says Miranda. "Southern gardeners can enjoy nonstop flowers."

**BEAUTIFUL FOR BOUQUETS**

*Incrediball smooth hydrangea*  
With oversized flower heads and sturdy stems, Incrediball makes a real statement in an arrangement. Miranda

notes that its blooms slowly change hue, saying, "While the flowers start white, they age to jade green as the season progresses."

**MADE FOR THE SHADE**

*Gatsby Pink oakleaf hydrangea*  
As understory plants, oakleaf hydrangeas love shade. Sometimes the lack of sun means fewer blooms—but not for Gatsby Pink. Miranda says, "It produces white, fragrant flowers that age to pink, which will surely brighten your shady spots."

**SMALL-SPACE STAR**  
*Tiny Tuff Stuff mountain hydrangea*

Miranda promises that this one lives up to its cultivar name. She says, "As one of the smallest mountain hydrangeas on the market, at only 2 feet tall and wide, it's perfectly sized for containers."

**BIG, BOLD HUES**

*Let's Dance Big Band bigleaf hydrangea*  
Bigleaf hydrangeas, such as this vivid cultivar, are prized for their ability to change color, depending on soil acidity. "They turn a vibrant pink in basic soils, a deep blue in acidic soils, or a rich violet if your soil falls somewhere in the middle," Miranda says.

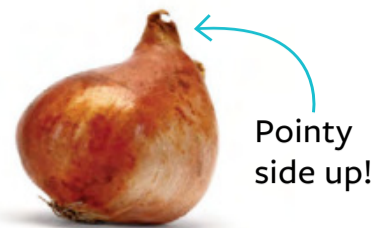
**READY TO PLANT**

Hydrangeas are easy to grow in the right conditions. Go to [birdsandblooms.com/hydrangeaON22](https://birdsandblooms.com/hydrangeaON22) or hover your camera here to see the seven things to know when planting them.





# Bulb Basics



*How to plant tulips in fall for a bounty of spring colors.*

## PICK A SPOT

*Find an area with more than six hours of direct sunlight a day. Some afternoon shade is preferable in hot climates, but it is not necessary.*

## TIME IT RIGHT

Wait to plant until nighttime temps are consistently 40 or 50 degrees. In the North, that usually means late September or October. Southern gardeners may need to wait until late winter or chill their bulbs.

## PREP THE SOIL

Loosen about a foot of soil. Tulips need well-draining soil to avoid rot, so consider adding compost or other amendments to improve the flow of water.

## PLACE THE BULBS

Plant each one in a hole that's three times as deep as the bulb is tall, or about 6 to 8 inches. Leave 4 to 5 inches between the bulbs for dense but not overcrowded planting.

## TOP OFF

*Lightly pack down the soil to cover the bulbs. Water well to kick-start growth. If next spring is very dry, saturate the soil to give the bulbs a boost. Wait until next fall to water again.*

## GROW IN A POT

Follow the same instructions when planting tulips in containers. Gardeners in Zones 3 to 7 may need to bring pots into an unheated basement or garage for protection against frost.



Black parrot tulip

## SELECT QUALITY

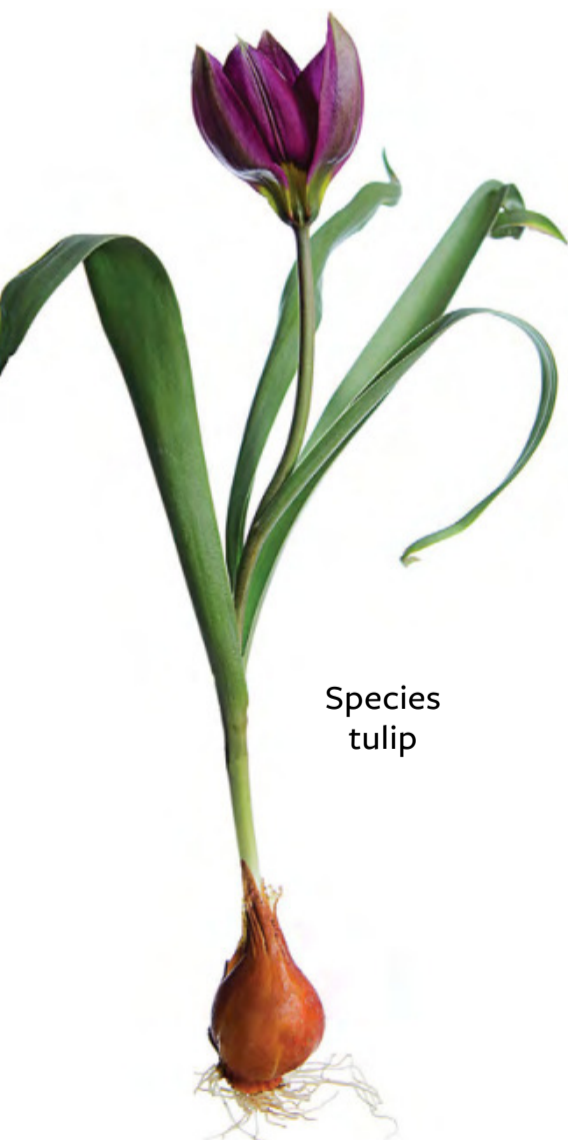
Buy firm and blemish-free bulbs. Soft or moldy bulbs are more likely to carry plant diseases or to rot before spring.

## SPREAD THE BLOOM

*Mix tulips that have different flowering times for color throughout spring. Better yet, combine them with summer-blooming bulbs such as lilies, alliums or gladioluses.*

## DETER CRITTERS

Tulips are a tasty treat for voles, chipmunks and more in winter. At planting, surround the bulbs with a ½-inch wire mesh cage. Most rodents won't be able to access your treasures, and the spring sprouts should emerge from the mesh just fine.



Species tulip

FROM TOP: SUMIRE8; DEEPGREEN/SHUTTERSTOCK (2); ROBERT MURRAY/500PX/GETTY IMAGES



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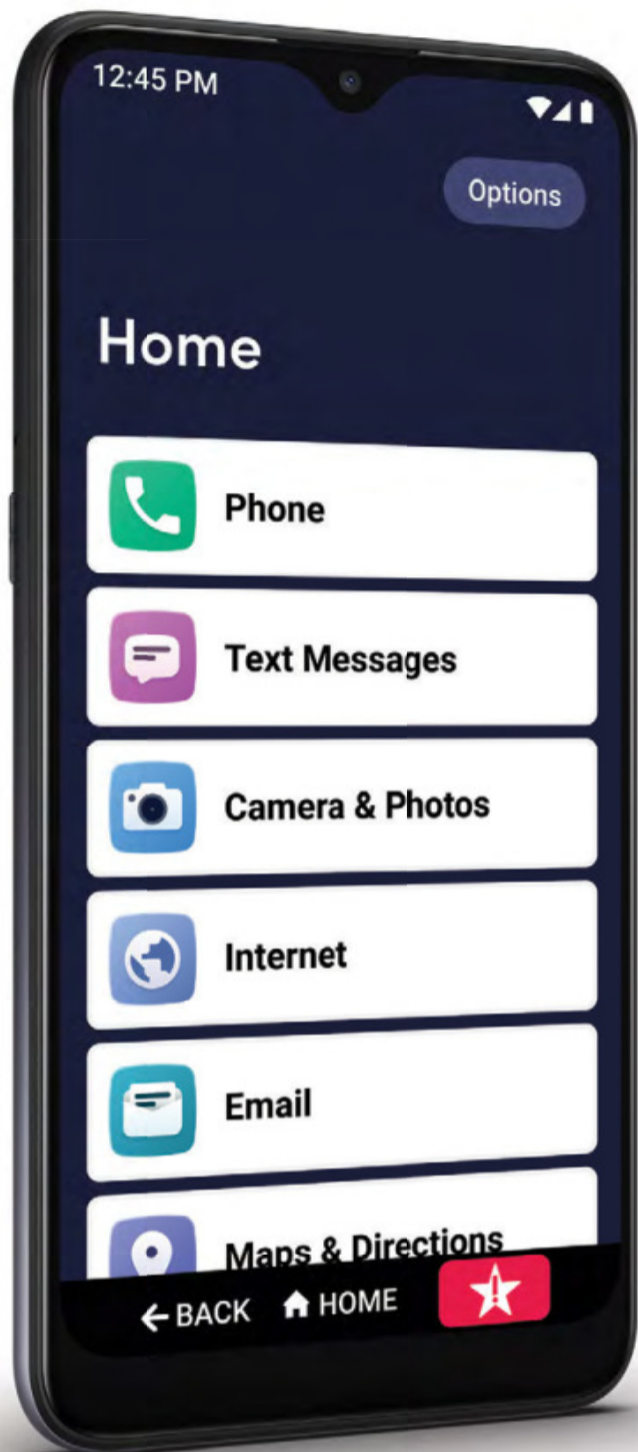
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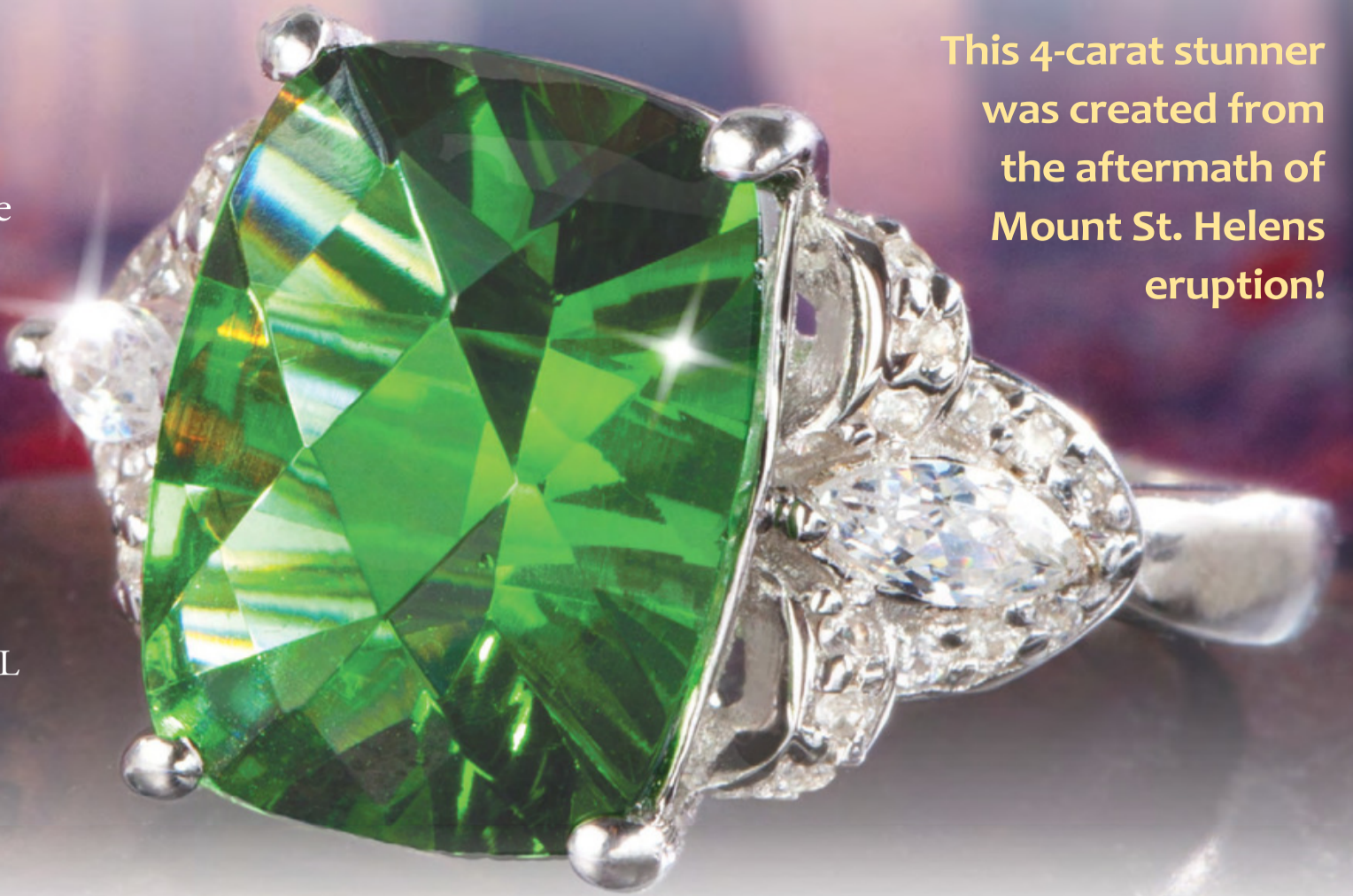
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# Wade into Nature

*Experience autumn hues through readers' camera lenses.*



**The fall leaf colors** created a wonderful reflection on the serene water at Sterne Park in Littleton, Colorado. I captured the scene, along with a male wood duck, with my Canon 5D Mark IV.

**Robert Magee** DENVER, COLORADO

**CALM  
WATERS**

Look for wood ducks in small lakes, slow-moving rivers, and ponds created by beavers. The ducks are less likely to be found in open water.





**I heard about**

red-breasted nuthatch sightings in the area, and I was thrilled to find the bird on my new sunflower feeder. I'm not sure if it was attracted to the new feeder specifically, but I'm glad it came!

**Nancy Tully**

EAST STROUDSBURG,  
PENNSYLVANIA



**IN THE TREES**

Yellow-billed cuckoos are seen in most of the eastern United States, but the fliers are often overlooked in their dense forest homes.

**When I first**

saw this bird, I had no idea what it was. It wasn't one that we commonly see around our backyard in the foothills of North Carolina. I was surprised and delighted to learn it was a yellow-billed cuckoo. I haven't seen it since, although I've heard its call from the woods surrounding our home a couple of times.

**Sandra Adams**

BOONVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA





**I dried** a number of sunflowers to use as a food source in my yard for birds, like this black-capped chickadee. My feathered guests really enjoy these organic feeders.

**Monica Brill**  
MOUNT MORRIS, NEW YORK

## I feed blue jays peanuts

every morning and afternoon in my backyard. If they run out of peanuts on the patio, they start calling loudly. But as long as they have their treats, they don't seem to bully the birds at my feeders. This blue jay posed for me after carefully selecting a peanut. I took the photo in fall, when the jays are typically busy stashing peanuts for winter.

**Anne Duvall**  
GREENCASTLE, PENNSYLVANIA





## BIRD TALES



**When they return** in the fall, warblers seem to favor native plants as sources for insects and caterpillars. I spotted a Nashville warbler moving among the goldenrods, so I knelt down a bit to conceal myself. I waited for the bird to get close enough so I could snap this photo. **Travis Bonovsky** BROOKLYN CENTER, MINNESOTA



**I went on a pontoon ride** with two of my favorite bird nerd friends. While looking up into the trees at great blue herons, I spotted some beautiful autumn colors in the crook of a tree along the shore. As I was thinking about how a bird would make the photo more wonderful, this little red-eyed vireo showed up and obliged. **Heather Farrell** STREATOR, ILLINOIS







## The California scrub-jays

were vocal on the morning that I took this photo. A jay with an acorn in its beak settled briefly on an outer branch of a coast live oak. I had only a few moments to capture it flying away to its next spot. The timing of this photo is perfect as it shows the bird leaping off with one wing spread while the other was unfurling.

**Sandeep Dhar**

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

**Early one morning,** I had coffee with the sunrise in my backyard and decided to take a few photos. I looked over and saw a downy woodpecker giving a little attitude to a chipping sparrow. It was as if the woodpecker was saying, “Hey! I was here first!” I couldn’t help but smile. I enjoy bird-watching and seeing how the different species live among each other.

**Megan Clark**

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA





**B L A C K**

**B E A U T I E S**

**B**

BRIGHT, COLORFUL BIRDS get all the glory, but these captivating coal-colored creatures are fun to encounter, even if some of them are a bit spooky looking.

**BY KELSEY ROSETH**

Common  
grackles







American  
crow

Crows and their larger cousins, the ravens, are often represented in fables and folklore. Seeing a single crow is bad luck in some cultures.

---





European  
starling





*The Birds*, a horror-thriller film released in 1963, made movie-goers fearful of feathered friends, especially those sporting midnight hues.

### **AMERICAN CROW**

These super smart, big birds are jet black from crown to claw, and they can be heard cawing across the continent. Crows are ground feeders and eat almost anything: carrion, chicks, small animals, seeds, insects, earthworms and more.

Trudy Stone, a backyard birder based in Nashville, Tennessee, respects crows for their intelligence. When she was young, Trudy's family had regular run-ins with crows, which used to collect her mom's Coppertone caps as she sat out sunbathing. "They'd steal the tops, and then they had a hidy-hole they'd put them in," she recalls.

American crows previously lived primarily in rural areas, but their habitat has changed over time. These clever creatures have used their smarts to adapt to life in cities, and are now common fixtures in urban birding.

### **COMMON GRACKLE**

Look for glossy iridescent features on these long-tailed, beautiful blackbirds. Residing east of the Rocky Mountains, the ground feeders use their long legs to walk in lawns and fields, eating anything edible, from crops to food castoffs.

According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, common grackles are the top threat to corn, as they "eat ripening corn as well as corn sprouts, and their habit of foraging in big flocks mean they have a multimillion-dollar impact." That said, populations are in steep decline and have fallen an estimated 54% over the course of about 50 years.

### **EUROPEAN STARLING**

Also iridescent in plumage, European starlings are stocky songbirds that sport short tails, orange feet and long, bright yellow bills. Often found in cities and towns, these ground foragers eat insects.

In the 1890s, about 100 European starlings were brought across the Atlantic and released into New York



Adult male  
American  
redstart



The haunting call of a common loon is frequently used as a sound effect in many movies, such as *Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones* and *1917*, during spooky scenes.

---

Common loon





City's Central Park. In that era, birds from all over the world were introduced to North America, but only a few became established. Their population today is estimated at 200 million from Alaska to Mexico.

### **DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT**

With yellow-orange face accents, a snaky neck, aquamarine eyes and matte black plumage, these long, tall birds appear almost prehistoric. Birders find them across the country, often standing on docks or islands in fresh or salt water, stretching their wings to dry in the sun. These expert fishers are efficient hunters and are often in conflict with those who work in the aquaculture industry, including catfish farmers.

“Large flocks of cormorants come through, and they can wipe out a pond,” says Greg Yarrow, one of the founders of the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management. “They’ve been deemed ‘murder on wings’ by some.”

### **AMERICAN REDSTART**

These coal black warblers sport striking orange plumage on their wings, tails and sides. Birders can spot these sweeties, found across the U.S., in deciduous woodlands, hopping along tree limbs or dashing through trees in search of insects. The birds are known for flashing their feathers in an effort to frighten their prey from out of the foliage. Redstarts are attracted to small berries and fruits such as barberries, serviceberries and magnolia berries.

### **BLACK VULTURE**

A plentiful Southeast-based scavenger, the black vulture has a black body, a short tail, a wrinkly black head and white wingtips, which are visible as these birds soar the skies. “They are flying waste management,” Greg says.

Long known as scavengers, vultures have evolved their feeding techniques over time and now are also considered predators. They regularly come into



Black vulture

conflict with humans, damaging property and eating young livestock, so people have invented unique means of scaring this bird, which some consider spooky. “Use effigies of vultures and hang them upside down. This tends to freak the vultures out,” Greg says.

### **COMMON LOON**

Haunting, eerie calls are the hallmark of this fish-eating fowl. Spotted on lakes and ponds across the U.S., these black-and-white water birds are agile divers as well as strong swimmers. They chase, catch and grip fish with the frighteningly sharp projections on the roof of their mouth and tongue.

They come ashore only to nest, and they look much less intense on land. Their legs are at the back of their body for strong swimming, but it makes walking awkward. ●

*Fargo, North Dakota-based freelance writer Kelsey Roseth has an unpopular opinion—her favorite coal-colored creature is the European starling.*





# *Flowing into* **FALL**

*PLAN A LANDSCAPE THAT FLOURISHES BEYOND  
JUST SPRING AND SUMMER FOR A SPACE BOTH  
YOU AND THE VISITING WILDLIFE WILL LOVE.*

**BY LUKE MILLER**





Combine ornamental grasses, asters and maple trees to create a bold autumn look.

## *As peak growing season winds down,*

it's time to think about extending your garden's interest into fall. Discounted plants are abundant this time of year, and birds will certainly be thankful for additional sustenance and shelter. Plus, cool-weather landscaping can absolutely still be beautiful.

After four decades of designing and installing gardens, Darryl Abraham of Naples, New York, appreciates options that aren't just easy on the eyes but also on the back. "I'm on the naturalizing, low-maintenance side of things," he says.

He also knows the value of working in layers and using a variety of plants—trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers and ground covers—for contrast in height, shape and texture. Some of his favorite fall plants include red twig dogwood, gray dogwood, rose of Sharon, ornamental grasses, goldenrod, milkweed and American bittersweet.

Darryl is an advocate for autumn gardens thanks in part to his parents, garden authors and radio hosts George "Doc" and Katy Abraham. They grew lush landscapes that included hazelnut shrubs, brambles, apple trees and more—for their own enjoyment and to help sustain wildlife.

To design a gorgeous outdoor space with lasting power, follow some of Darryl's top fall plant recommendations.

### GREAT GRASSES

Ornamental grasses peak after summer, when they reach their mature height and develop striking flower heads. Many turn an attractive buff color, which serves as a perfect backdrop for bright companions such as mums and sedums. And a few offer their own hues, such as flame grass (*Miscanthus* 'Purpurascens'), which turns a fiery red-orange.

Most grasses remain upright during the cooler months, adding extended interest. Darryl says, "They'll go right through the winter, have kind of a brown tuft, and then you cut them back in the spring and get the new growth coming out. They're fairly easy to maintain."





## APPEALING FRUITS

Certain fruitful plants attract birds in autumn, including mountain ash, a favorite of cedar and Bohemian waxwings. Other seasonal picks that get a thumbs-up from Darryl include American bittersweet, blackberries, cotoneaster and sumac, with its beautiful burgundy leaves in fall and conical fruiting structures.

## STANDOUT SHRUBS AND TREES

When it comes to adding trees and shrubs with flair, Darryl recommends mock orange and viburnum, which offer spring flowers and striking fall foliage. Rose of Sharon blooms from summer into early fall. And hydrangeas have large summer flowers that fade into attractive tones of pink and tan. Look to oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) for burgundy fall foliage.

As for trees, Darryl suggests both red or sugar maples for brilliant fall foliage and northern catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) for its cigar-shaped seedpods.

## FALL FLOWERS

While mums are a well-known seasonal standout, Darryl likes seed-bearing perennials that feed birds. He says, “Black-



Bumblebee  
visiting  
coneflower

eyed Susans are pretty tough, and echinacea is another good one.” Other favorites of his include Joe Pye weed and asters. Leave the flowers standing or break up the seed heads and cast them around for the birds.

## EVERGREEN BEAUTIES

“Birds pretty much like any kind of tree,” Darryl says. But he points out that they tend to especially enjoy the shelter of evergreens.

Some good options to plant include the western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), Chinese





Black-crested titmouse in a bigtooth maple

COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS - WWW.PROVENWINNERS.COM

juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*) and blue spruce (*Picea pungens*). For long-term success, always make sure the trees you select are suitable for your growing conditions and noninvasive for your area.

With the right picks and planning, it's easy to set up your garden for enjoyment well into fall. •

*Luke Miller was mentored by Darryl's parents, Doc and Katy Abraham, and admired all the plants in their garden—except for the sumac, to which he's allergic.*

## Potted Combos

Mix and match autumn plants that love containers.

- Chrysanthemums
- Coleus
- Coral bells
- Creeping Jenny
- Dusty miller
- Marigolds
- Melampodium
- Ornamental kale
- Pansies
- Petunias
- Purple fountain grass
- Sedges
- Zinnias



ColorBlaze Newly Noir coleus

Toffee Twist sedge

Sweet Caroline Red Hawk sweet potato vine

ColorBlaze Mini Me Watermelon and El Brighto coleus



### START THE PREP

Get your garden ready for fall and winter with eight outdoor chores you should never skip. Hover your phone's camera here or go to [birdsandblooms.com/fallchoresON22](https://birdsandblooms.com/fallchoresON22).





## SCHEDULE SWAP

Unlike most owl species, snowy owls are active mainly during the day. Find them in winter near coastlines, fields or airports.

# OUT & ABOUT OWLS





LUCKY READERS PHOTOGRAPHED THESE MAJESTIC—AND USUALLY NOCTURNAL—BIRDS DURING THE DAY.

**I DROVE TWO HOURS TO A HOT SPOT** along Lake Michigan in western Michigan in search of snowy owls. This image stood out because of its sharpness and the expression in the owl's eyes as it stared directly at the camera. I used a Tamron 150-600 mm zoom lens fitted on a Nikon D850 camera to take the picture.

**Phil Gleissner** GRANGER, INDIANA





## SHY FLIERS

Great gray owls avoid populated areas, so they're difficult to spot. But when caring for young, they're more likely to venture out in daylight to hunt rodents.

**THE GREAT GRAY OWL** is a rare, awe-inspiring sight in Yellowstone National Park. It was an honor to be in the presence of one of my favorite creatures and to capture an amazing image. I love that the owl is getting ready to take off—it seemed as if it posed just for me.

**Danielle Kennedy** HUNTINGTON STATION, NEW YORK





## STOCK THE PANTRY

Female great horned owls sit on their eggs day and night while the male brings food. When hunting is good, the male sometimes stores leftovers in the nest for the female.

## WHEN MY HUSBAND AND I STAYED

at Glen Eyrie Castle in Colorado Springs, we heard owls nearby. During a morning hike, we spotted two great horned owls. It was a special memory to see two close together. Because it was late winter, we believe they had a nest, but we never spotted it.

**Michelle Thompson** COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

## NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWLS

normally hunt at night, searching for mice, insects and bats. But this owl had just been released after a successful rehabilitation. It happily flew away after I took the photo.

**Dick Coe**  
ESTES PARK, COLORADO







**I GOT A PHONE CALL** from my former college roommate, who told me that three fledgling eastern screech-owls were in his backyard. I made the 80-mile trip, hoping they would still be there. Walking around back, we were surprised and pleased to see that a fourth owlet had joined them. You can see their curiosity and amusement as we snapped pictures from 50 feet away.

**Timothy Carroll** FULTON, NEW YORK

## ACTIVE HOURS

Although owls are busiest at night, it's also common to spot them hunting at dawn or dusk.

## TRAVELING THROUGH ARKANSAS,

I saw a barred owl on the side of a country road. It was about 9 in the morning, which I thought was strange for a nocturnal bird. I believe I interrupted its breakfast hunt. I snapped a few shots of it looking down and listening for its next meal.

**Shelley Ward**  
DADEVILLE, ALABAMA







## CREATE A HOME BASE

Screech-owls rest near their nests during the day. Add a nest box to your backyard for a chance to see them more often.



## A PAIR OF EASTERN SCREECH-OWLS

hang out in the nearby woods year-round and nest in my yard every spring. This is the male; he's a red morph, so his feathers are a rusty color. He was so alert while keeping watch by the nest.

**William Crotts** PALM BAY, FLORIDA ●





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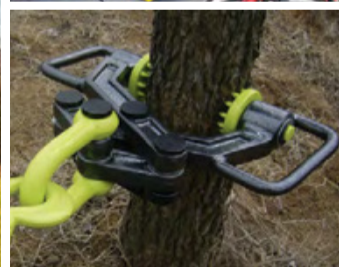
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Pileated woodpecker

**Q** Pileated woodpeckers strongly resemble ivory-billed woodpeckers. Are they related?

**Susan Shepherd** SANFORD, MICHIGAN

**Kenn and Kimberly:** These similar woodpeckers might seem to be close cousins, but they actually belong to different groups that are only distantly related. The ivory-billed woodpecker's closest relatives (genus *Campephilus*) live in the American tropics, while the genus of the pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus*) includes the black woodpecker of Europe and Asia. Unrelated but similar pairs occur elsewhere in the woodpecker family, too. Downy and hairy woodpeckers, familiar backyard visitors over much of North America, look almost identical except for size, but they are actually not close relatives. And in Asia, the greater yellownape and lesser yellownape—which are green woodpeckers with yellow in their crests—are near look-alikes but are not related at all.





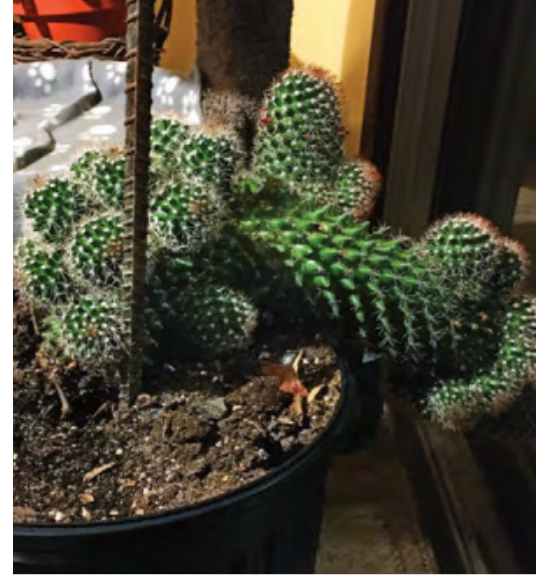
**Q** What kind of bird did I photograph?

**David Byron Keener** CHANTILLY, VIRGINIA

**Kenn and Kimberly:** That's a superb close-up of a truly tiny bird: the ruby-crowned kinglet. The name might suggest a more colorful bird, but only the male has on the top of his head a small patch of ruby red feathers, which are hidden most of the time. Look for short, thin bills on kinglets, nervous wing-flitting behavior, and the parallel white and black bars across the center of the wing. Two kinglet species are found in North America—the golden-crowned kinglet has black and white stripes on its head, while the ruby-crowned has a white ring around each eye.

**Q** Can I add fruit or vegetable seeds to suet or birdseed? **Robert Lang** WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WISCONSIN

**Kenn and Kimberly:** Seeds meant for growing fruits or vegetables are generally more expensive than regular birdseed, so we wouldn't recommend buying them for this purpose. But if you have leftover organic seeds that you won't use in other ways, some of them are safe to feed to birds. It's fine to offer seeds from squash, pumpkins, melons, peppers, pomegranates or tomatoes. Avoid using seeds from apples or pears, or the hard pits of peaches, apricots, cherries or plums, as these contain traces of toxic compounds that are harmful to backyard birds.



**Q** My cactus doesn't stay up on its own. Is there anything I can do?

**Melanie Mimmall** DAUPHIN, PENNSYLVANIA

**Melinda:** Other than the floppy habit, your cactus looks relatively healthy. Cactuses can flop when they receive insufficient light or when they're grown in an oversized container. Start by evaluating the amount of light the plant is receiving and move it to a brighter location, if needed. Cactuses have a small root system compared to the amount of top growth. The container your cactus is growing in looks rather large. Consider carefully lifting the plant out of the pot a few days after watering, when the soil is slightly moist. If the rootball is much smaller than the current container, move it to a smaller pot that is just slightly bigger than the root system.

**Q** Should I wait to plant winter annuals until the soil temperature drops significantly here in Texas?

**Pat Northington** AUSTIN, TEXAS

**Melinda:** Pansies, snapdragons, sweet alyssum, dianthus, and ornamental cabbages and kales are a few favorite winter annuals in Texas. They do best when planted in soil that is 45 to 70 degrees. A soil thermometer is a great tool for any gardener. Monitor the soil temperature, as well as the air temperature, to increase your planting success.

**PLENTY TO EAT** *Some kitchen foods are safe to offer to birds. Set out sliced apples with the seeds removed, halved bananas, raisins soaked in water to soften them or peanut butter, a bird-feeding favorite. Never serve bread, bacon fat or highly processed food.*





Groundhog

**Q** A groundhog loves my mums. Can I plant something nearby to discourage it? **Linda Hall** AURORA, INDIANA

**Melinda:** Unfortunately, no plants can actually deter groundhogs from eating flowers or shrubs. You may have heard rumors that gopher spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris*) repels gophers and moles. This hasn't been proven to be true, but this spurge is very aggressive, reseeds readily and is considered invasive in a few states.

Using fencing to deter them is challenging, as groundhogs both climb and burrow. Bury the bottom of a fence at least a foot deep or bend the bottom foot of fencing at a 90-degree angle and pin it to the ground. The fence needs to be 3 feet high, with the top 12 to 15 inches bent outward at a 45-degree angle to help keep groundhogs from climbing it. An electric fence mounted on posts with strands 4 inches and 9 inches above the ground is another option that is probably more effective. Look for electric fences at garden centers or online.

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**Q** What's this plant that appeared in my backyard? **Linda Kuehn** OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN

**Melinda:** A visiting bird likely passed along this plant. Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) berries are eaten by a variety of songbirds as well as mammals, including raccoons, opossums and gray foxes. The berries and other parts of the plant are poisonous to humans. You may also find several flies, wasps and bees visiting the flowers. Pokeweed grows in clearings, roadsides, open woods, damp thickets and other sites. It is native in much of North America, except for certain western regions.

**Q** House sparrows took over my feeders—even my upside-down suet feeder. What can I do? **Nancy Tatum** CARMEL, INDIANA

**Kenn and Kimberly:** It's a tough problem. House sparrows eat practically everything, and they're very resourceful in accessing most kinds of feeders. You can try offering Nyjer (thistle) seed in a tube-style feeder with very short perches. Goldfinches and siskins readily visit this food source, but house sparrows are more hesitant. Whole peanuts in the shell will attract blue jays and woodpeckers but not sparrows. Some people have tried hanging strings around a feeder, with a metal washer tied to each string to keep them hanging straight—house sparrows don't seem to like flying through the strings, but other birds will.



**Q** Last fall, I saw this caterpillar on my lantana. What is it?

**Ann Byrd** EDGEFIELD, SOUTH CAROLINA

**Kenn and Kimberly:** This beautiful creature is a rustic sphinx moth larva (*Manduca rustica*). More than 100 species of sphinx moths are found in the United States, and the larvae of most types have a raised hornlike appendage at the hind end—they're sometimes called hornworms for this reason. You can recognize the rustic sphinx caterpillar by the colors of its diagonal stripes, the different shades of green above and below those stripes, and the very rough or granular surface of its horn. Lantana is a common host plant for these caterpillars.

## MEET THE EXPERTS



*Kimberly and Kenn Kaufman are the duo behind the Kaufman Field Guide series. They speak and lead bird trips all over the world.*



*Melinda Myers is a nationally known, award-winning garden expert, TV/radio host and author of more than 20 books.*









Katydid

# Music in the Dark

*When the sun sets, a night symphony begins—meet a few of the insect players.*

BY SALLY ROTH

**Y**ou can't see the singers in the shadows, but you sure can hear them! Their music fills the night air—pulsating, chirping, clicking and buzzing from every direction. The concert starts soon after dusk and keeps going strong until around midnight, and it can last well into November in some areas.

Who are these secret singers? Crickets and katydids. Depending on where you call home, you might hear any of hundreds of different

species, including a couple with amusing and grand monikers. For example, you might hear the aptly named melodious ground cricket, splendid shield-backed katydid or robust conehead.

Night-singing insects fill all sorts of ecological niches, making homes under logs and in fields, marshes, deserts, shrubs, trees or grasses—and our own yards, too. To boost the number and variety of your musicians, naturalist and educator Carl Strang, who holds a doctorate in wildlife ecology,



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Field cricket

## Guess That Tune

Identifying night singers can be a challenge, so start by simply enjoying the symphony, suggests wildlife ecologist and educator Carl Strang. Learning who's singing is "comparable to learning birdsong," Carl says. You'll need to match their sounds to recordings. Go to the Singing Insects of North America website, and click "Sample songs of crickets and katydids" for examples of their tunes.

For a quick and easy foundation, start with the big three, which are widespread, abundant and loud.

**1 Field cricket** (both spring and fall species, which overlap): High-pitched throbbing chirps

**2 Snowy tree cricket:** A deeper rhythmic chirping, often misidentified as the song of field crickets

**3 Common true katydid:** A grating three-syllable rasp, declaring *katy did!*

recommends planting your garden in layers: "The same as you would for birds, with a nice structure of trees, bushes and herbaceous plants, including natives."

Only the male katydids and crickets sing. They do it for the same main reasons birds do: to attract mates and defend their territories. But, unlike birds, they do it with their bodies, not their voices. To entice females and warn off competitors, they scrape one wing against another in a mechanical act called stridulation. The females hear them through earlike structures on their legs, then go to where the boys are.

Nearly all nighttime singers are vegetarians, nibbling on foliage,

fungi or sometimes flowers. They don't cause problems or threaten agriculture; they just go about their lives right under our noses, and we rarely even notice them in the daytime. "You may see them if you're moving around, working on your garden," Carl says. "Watch for motion, because they'll be moving out of your way!"

Birds have no problem spotting night singers during the day and scour the foliage to ferret them out, even though the insects are silent and camouflaged. Parasitic wasps search for them, too, to use as hosts for their eggs and to develop larvae. Mice and other small animals also may snatch up the musical insects.

These bugs are cold-blooded, so they fiddle even faster as the temperature rises and slow down when it's cooler. For a fun little game, try using a snowy tree cricket as a thermometer. Count the number of chirps in 13 seconds, add 40, and presto—that's the approximate temp in Fahrenheit!

*Sally Roth's elderly mother was delighted to have a "cricket on the hearth," like the Charles Dickens story, but her family didn't have the heart to tell her it was her smoke detector chirping due to a dying battery. They discreetly installed another battery, and commiserated when her cricket finally went silent.*



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# How do you serve peanut butter to birds?

*Readers share their favorite ways to offer the high-protein snack to backyard visitors.*

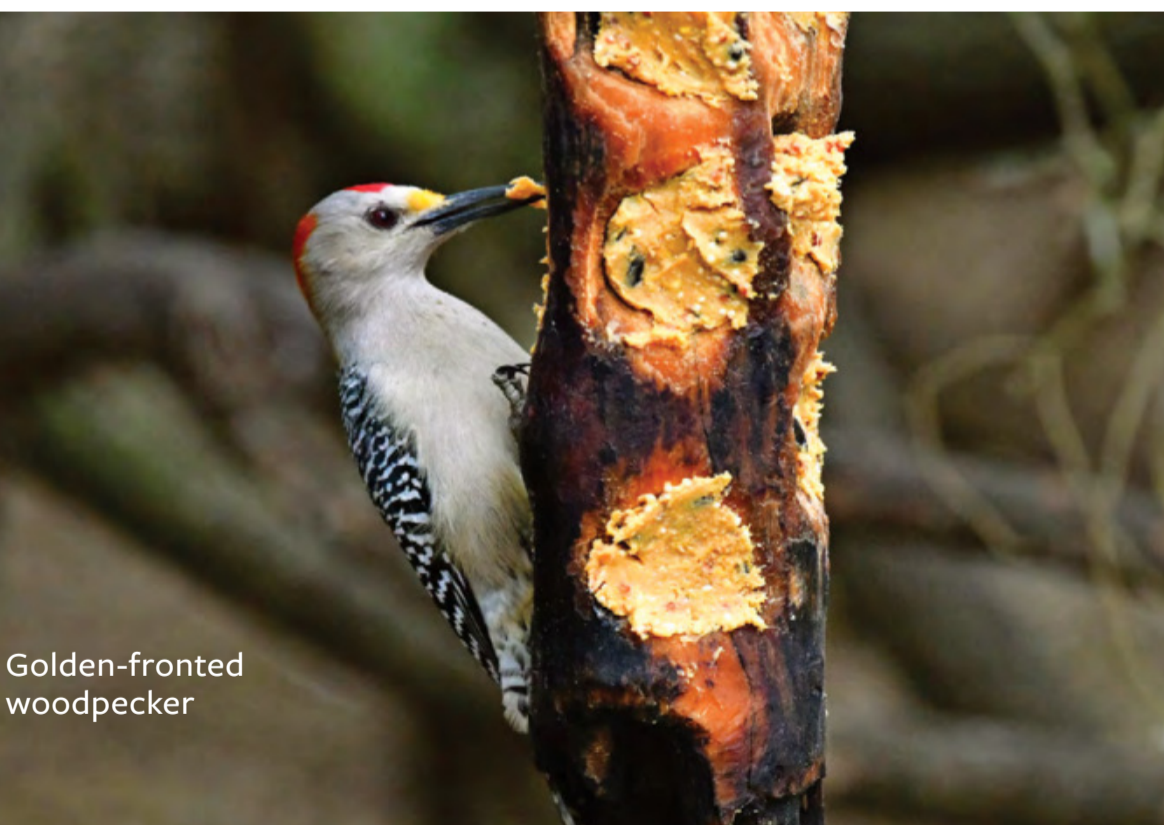
Watch for peanut butter to go on sale throughout the summer. When it gets colder, **I stir in yellow cornmeal to make my own suet.** It attracts mostly sparrows, but their songs are music to my ears during long winters. **Sue Nipe** SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA

---

**I drill holes in fallen branches, smear peanut butter in the holes and hang them on trees.** **Allan Trabant** CHILLIWACK, BRITISH COLUMBIA

---

**Mix crunchy peanut butter with birdseed** and mold it in cookie cutters. **Trish Vowels** WINSTON, OREGON



Golden-fronted woodpecker

**I coat empty toilet paper rolls with peanut butter,** roll them in birdseed and hang with ribbon. It's an instant bird feeder that visitors enjoy. **Suzanne Girsch** GENEVA, ILLINOIS

Tufted titmouse and white-breasted nuthatch



I teach preschool in Vermont. The children all get a scoop of peanut butter to **fill every nook and cranny of a pine cone.** We hang them on trees and fences for the birds.

**Dolly Spooner**  
DERBY LINE, VERMONT

---

**Spread peanut butter on a shelled corncob** and roll in your choice of seed. It tends to last longer than pine cones stuffed with peanut butter.

**Debra Radmer**  
NEW LONDON, WISCONSIN

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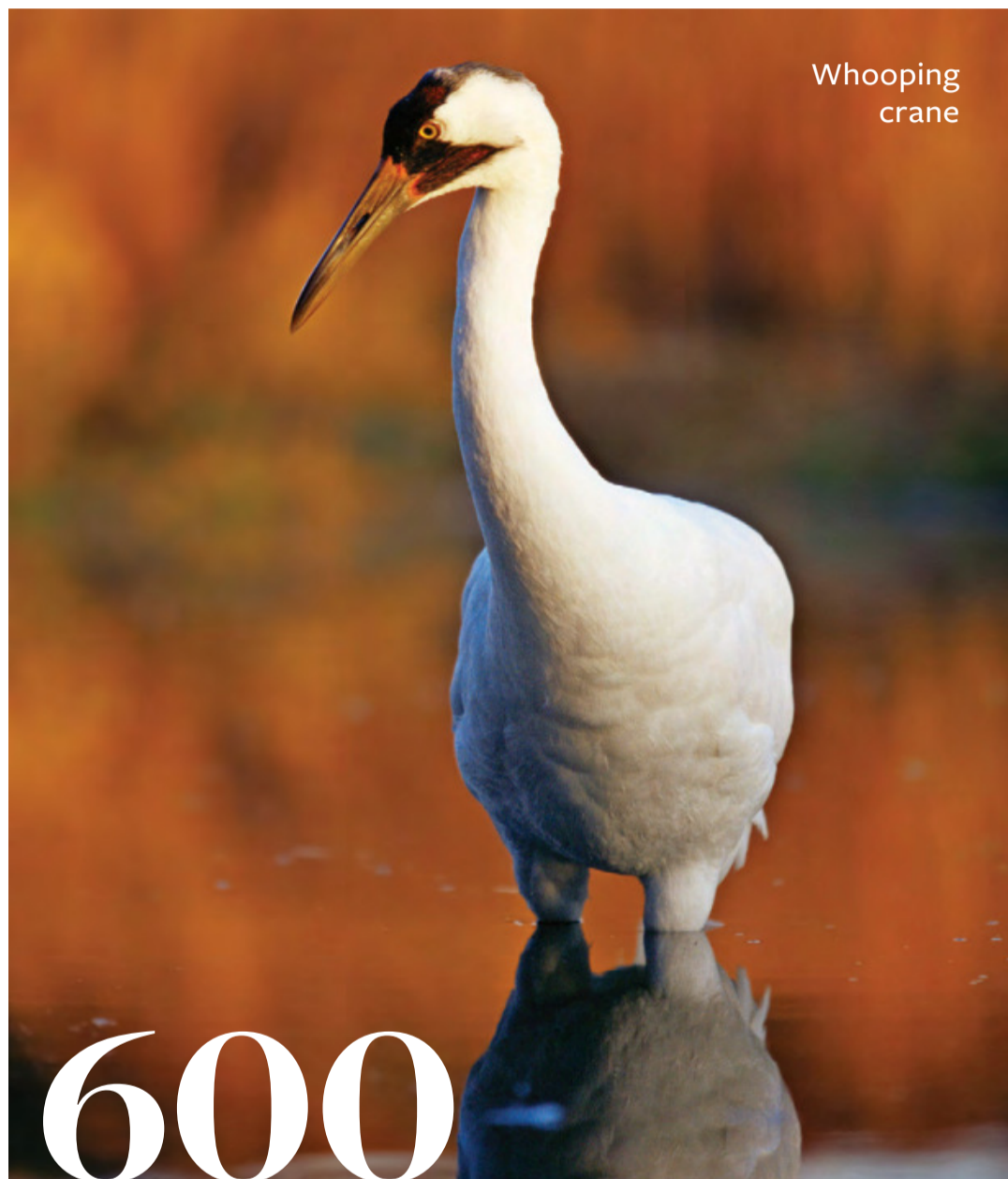


DID YOU KNOW?

# Dances with Cranes

*Kick up facts about these elegant and endangered birds.*

BY KAITLIN STAINBROOK



Whooping crane

# 600

*Thanks to conservation efforts, about 600 whooping cranes are alive today. Some scientists even hand-rear chicks while dressed as adult cranes so the young don't imprint on people.*

# 2,400

The only self-sustaining flock of whooping cranes in the wild migrates around 2,400 miles from Canada to Texas each year.

A pair of cranes on the Texas Gulf Coast



# 80

Whooping cranes are omnivorous, eating both plants and animals. They especially love blue crabs and can eat up to 80 in a day.

**5** *Standing nearly 5 feet tall, they are the tallest birds in North America.*

# 1941

Because of unregulated hunting and habitat loss, fewer than two dozen whooping cranes were estimated to be alive in 1941.

**1** *During courtship dances, a crane bows its head, flaps its wings and leaps into the air to form and strengthen its bond with its one mate for life.*

**2** Female whooping cranes typically lay two eggs per clutch, and both parents play an active role in building the nest and feeding the young.

FROM TOP: LYNN M. STONE/NPL/MINDEN PICTURES; MARK NEWMAN/GETTY IMAGES

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—*Emily Bronte*

”



Hermit thrush  
in maple tree