



# Alamosa Landscapes

## Native Plants and Birds

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Consider including some native plants that attract birds in your garden plans this year. I'm not much of a birder, but I love to see birds in my yard. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology website helped me check bird ranges while the Audubon and Bird Conservancy websites helped me with information on appropriate plants for Alamosa. Website URLs are listed at the end of this column.

Native plants that grow well in Alamosa and attract a variety of birds include black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), common sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*), golden currant (*Ribes aureum*), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), and showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*). Most of these plants attract a wide range of birds including thrushes (robins are in this category), woodpeckers, sparrows, wrens, nuthatches, grosbeaks, crows, jays, waxwings, and finches.

Showy milkweed is known for serving as a host for monarch butterflies. While I appreciate this and like their pinkish flowers and seed heads, they tend to take over a garden. Therefore, I leave a few and pull a lot!

One of my favorite flowers that is easy to grow is Rocky Mountain penstemon (*Penstemon strictus*). Apparently it is less attractive to birds – Audubon only lists hummingbirds as interested in it.

There are two native sumacs that attract birds. I have three-leaf sumac (*Rhus trilobata*), a low spreading shrub that I love as it doesn't allow weeds to grow under it and takes little care. Apparently fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) should do well here. My sumacs are stripped of berries by late fall. David Menough of the Bird Conservancy says the tree-leaf variety provides food for 32 species of birds. Oh, and deer apparently enjoy it as well. I'm glad my yard is deer proof!

There are quite a few ponderosa pines (*Pinus ponderosa*) in Alamosa. Apparently, it is the most common pine in North America. It is drought resistant, grows in full sun to shade, and in dry to moist, sandy, gravelly, or clay soils. It may attract finches, wrens, thrushes, crows, jays, sparrows, and woodpeckers. I have a fairly young one, but it hasn't produced any cones yet and I don't see birds hanging around it.

A favorite shrub of mine is the Saskatoon serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*). I fell in love with it when traveling through western Canada many years ago. My first one was chewed up by a neighborhood dog

and my second one is competing with other shrubs in an area of my garden with some more aggressive shrubs. It does produce a few berries each year that are gone by late fall. I did plant a new serviceberry last year, Shadblow (*Amelanchier Canadensis*) as I couldn't find a Saskatoon locally. I'll see how it does – it is native to eastern North America and isn't quite as hardy.

I love dogwoods with red branches. Audubon lists red osier dogwood as *Cornus alba*, a shrub I don't have. Ohio State University (OSU- [hvp.osu.edu/pocketgardener](http://hvp.osu.edu/pocketgardener)) lists red osier dogwood as *Cornus sericea* which I have. I love the red stems in winter and birds do like any bits of fruit it produces. The naming of the two is confusing. OSU addresses this saying that “many times cultivars of *Cornus sericea* are listed under *Cornus alba* or vice versa, with the two species often confused and used interchangeably in the nursery industry.”

Last, but not least of my native favorites is bluebell of Scotland (*Campanula rotundifolia*) I used to have several of these small bell flowers; they spread gently. I don't know if they needed more sun under our growing cottonwood (several sites say they do well in shade) or better soil (lots of roots from the tree) or something else. They have since died out and I think I'll try again. Seedlings germinate quickly, but don't produce flowers until the second year. Hummingbirds especially love them.

One shrub that Audubon lists as attracting a variety of birds is the pink wood rose (*Rosa woodsia*). I have a patch that's about 30 sq. ft. and the branches are still loaded with lots of bright red rose hips. Apparently, no takers in our garden!

There is a native bird attracter that I avoid – common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). I love this in the mountains, but it is invasive in the home garden and very hard to remove. I pulled roots for five years before eradicating it. You just might want this if you desire a very low care, native plant with white flowers.

You can view photos and information on most of these plants by visiting [Alamosaflowers.net](http://Alamosaflowers.net) and [Alamosatrees.net](http://Alamosatrees.net).

Websites consulted: Cornell Lab of Ornithology – [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org), Audubon – [Audubon.org/native-plants](http://Audubon.org/native-plants), David Menough of Wild Birds Unlimited of Arvada – [birdconservancy.org](http://birdconservancy.org)

*“The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies.”* Gertrude Jekyll