

Fleshy Fruits for Feathered Flight

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Of all the benefits trees provide, one that is extremely important is food for wildlife. More specifically, many of our native trees (and vines that grow on them) produce fleshy fruits, which can be a critical part of many songbirds' diets. Red mulberries, serviceberries, and black cherries are ripe and ready in the summer, and these are consumed by birds of all ages, from nestlings to fledglings to adults. When fall arrives, nature ups its game: flowering dogwoods, mountain hollies, sassafras, black gums and sumacs are just a few of our native trees whose fleshy fruits are consumed by all kinds of birds, especially migratory birds during their southerly journeys. Also available at this time are fruits of all kinds of native vines, including grapes, briars, Virginia creeper, and even the dreaded poison ivy; and yes indeed, birds do eat poison ivy fruits, with no adverse effects to them! As winter sets in, other trees such as red cedar, American holly, and even hackberry can become magnets of fruit foraging activity, sometimes with large flocks of birds "dining and dashing." Many of the birds that consume fleshy fruits do the trees a favor by dispersing the seeds intact: a "win win" for everyone involved.

If you have any questions or comments please send them to treeboard@knoxvilletn.gov."