

# Wildlife Values of Conservation Trees and Shrubs



[conservation seedlings: buyer's guide](#)  
(28-page, full color 1.25 megabyte PDF file)

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*this information was compiled January, 1995 and updated January, 1997; by [Kent Grant](#),  
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**Note:** Clicking on any scientific species name which is linked will take you to the [plant database](#) which provides additional information on selected species

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The Colorado State Forest Service tree program enables farmers, ranchers, and rural landowners to obtain trees at nominal cost. The program's aim is to encourage landowners with two acres or more to successfully establish conservation tree plantings.

Planting windbreaks, shelterbelts, or providing erosion to attract wildlife is a common objective for many landowners. Each wildlife species has its own habitat requirements, and landowners can attract individual species by planting trees and shrubs to enhance wildlife food and cover. For example, pheasants (and other game birds) are attracted to windbreaks having a fruit-bearing shrub row such as plum or Nanking cherry.

A more complex windbreak design for game birds incorporates a "thicket" planting. The windbreak keeps the thicket free of snow in winter and creates a snow storage area that can be planted with milo, millet, or sunflowers to provide game birds a winter food source and a hidden loafing area. Thicket plantings are usually square in shape with fruit-bearing shrubs spaced 4 to 6 feet apart.

When planting to increase wildlife habitat, decide first which wildlife species you wish to attract. To attract deer and elk, plant tree and shrub species which provide them with a winter source of food and cover. Big game animals seek feeding areas that are out of view of humans and roadways, so select planting sites that are near a mature stand of trees. If this is not possible, interplant trees and shrubs within the browsing area. Also, when planting to provide a source of browse for wintering deer and elk, protect seedlings from browsing during the first several years; an electric fence enclosure can offer effective protection.

If songbirds and rabbits are preferred, but deer and elk frequent the area, select less desirable browse species or fence the area; otherwise, the planting will be destroyed by excessive browsing.

## Shrubs

**CARAGANA (SIBERIAN PEASHRUB)** (*Caragana arborescens*): Used for nesting by several songbirds and the seeds are often eaten. Not a preferred food for browsing animals. Provides good cover. (introduced from Siberia)

**COTONEASTER** (*Cotoneaster acutifolia*): Provides roosting and loafing cover for numerous songbirds and game birds, and some utilize the fruits for food (esp. catbird and mockingbird). Not a preferred browse for animals. (introduced from northern China)

**HONEYSUCKLE** (*Lonicera tatarica*): Provides fruit which is eaten by a number of songbirds. Also provides some cover for both bird and animal species, but has little value as a browse source. Preferred nesting site for many songbirds. Prefers open, moist areas; good in fence rows. Provides food for songbirds, rabbits, quail, and turkeys. (introduced from southern Siberia)

**CHOKECHERRY** ([\*Prunus virginiana\*](#)): All parts of plant has some benefit to wildlife for winter food, but most important during summer and fall. Among the most important plants for wildlife cover and food. The shrubby, thicket-forming growth provides cover for songbird nesting, loafing, and roosting; and animal loafing and bedding. The fruit and foliage are relished by a great number of wildlife species, including songbirds, upland game birds (particularly sharp-tailed grouse), rodents, and other small mammals, bears, and whitetail and mule deer. (native to most of North America)

**COMMON LILAC** (*Syringa vulgaris*): Because of root suckers, provides high quality cover for numerous species of birds and animals. Little value for fruit or browse. (introduced from eastern Europe)

**NATIVE (AMERICAN) PLUM** ([\*Prunus americana\*](#)): Highly important as wildlife cover and food. The thorny, suckering growth when protected forms a thicket valuable for bird nesting, loafing, and roosting, and animal loafing and bedding. Twigs and foliage provide a highly preferred browse for whitetail and mule deer. Foxes are chief consumers of fruit. (native over eastern two-thirds of central North America, including eastern Colorado)

**SKUNKBUSH SUMAC (QUAILBUSH)** ([\*Rhus trilobata\*](#)): Prefers moist, sunny, open areas, but will grow in dry locations. Good in fence row, along roads, and canal/stream edges. Important fall and winter food for songbirds, woodpeckers, and deer, and emergency winter food for game birds. Fruit and buds are staple food for sharp-tailed grouse. A good source of vitamin A. Bark and twigs eaten by rabbits, rodents, and deer. Provides high quality roosting and loafing cover for

many bird species and is a preferred nest site for many thicket-nesting birds. (native to western North America)

**WESTERN SANDCHERRY (BESSEY CHERRY)** (*Prunus besseyi*): Provides preferred fruit for numerous songbirds. Growth form creates good roosting and loafing cover for songbirds and game birds, and nesting cover for songbirds. Occasionally browsed by deer. Short-lived; notable decline in vigor after 5 years. (native to northern Great Plains, including northeastern Colorado)

**NANKING CHERRY** (*Prunus tomentosa*): Utilized by a few songbirds as nesting cover and produces a fruit that is relished by many songbirds. Preferred browse for rabbits, other rodents, and whitetail and mule deer. (introduced, native to China and Japan)

**EUROPEAN SAGE** ([\*Artemisia abrotanum\*](#)): Good in semi-arid sites. Better for cover than for food, but is eaten by antelope, mule deer, and small mammals. (introduced variety of sage)

**WOODS ROSE** ([\*Rosa woodsii\*](#)): Good in fence rows, along roads, and borders for windbreaks. Especially good during bad winter weather as food. High in vitamin C. Important food to upland game birds (such as grouse and prairie chickens) and deer. Also an excellent nesting/escape cover for songbirds and gamebirds. (native to much of North America)

**SILVER BUFFALOBERRY** ([\*Shepherdia argentea\*](#)): Will sucker like native plum and form thickets. Thorny thickets create ideal cover for numerous bird and animal species. Preferred nesting site for many songbirds. Some birds like the brown thrasher eat the fruit although it is not relished by a wide variety of species. (native to northwestern North America, including Colorado)

**GOLDEN CURRANT** ([\*Ribes aureum\*](#)): Good cover for birds and small mammals. Good palatability to game animals. Preferred roosting, loafing, or nesting cover for several songbirds and has general use by many birds for food. A preferred browse for mule deer. (native to western North America)

**NEW MEXICO FORESTIERA (PRIVET)** (*Forestiera neomexicana*): A thicket-former providing good cover. Fruit valuable to quail and songbirds. (native to southwestern U.S., including southwest Colorado)

**MOUNTAIN MAHOGANY** ([\*Cercocarpus montanus\*](#)): Very important browse for big game. Seed valuable for small game birds and mammals. (native to western North America)

**ANTELOPE BITTERBRUSH** ([\*Purshia tridentata\*](#)): Very important browse for deer, elk, antelope, and livestock (except horses). Seed valuable for chipmunks. (native to western North America)

**SASKATOON SERVICEBERRY (JUNEBERRY)** ([\*Amelanchier alnifolia\*](#)): Will grow in dry, rocky areas. High quality plant for wildlife cover and food. The sweet, juicy berries are sought by songbirds and game birds in early summer. Squirrels, rodents, and bears also eat fruit. Whitetail, mule deer, and elk browse twigs and foliage extensively. The shrubby growth provides cover for bird nesting, loafing, and roosting; and animal loafing and bedding. (native to western North America)

**FOURWING SALTBUSH** ([\*Atriplex canescens\*](#)): Provides cover and food for quail, songbirds, and small mammals as well as forage for antelope, whitetail deer, and mule deer. (native to western U.S.)

**COYOTE (SANDBAR) WILLOW** ([\*Salix exigua\*](#)): Sandbar and other varieties of riparian willows are very important as browse and cover for big game, especially in fall and winter. Also important as food and cover for birds, particularly blue grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, and ptarmigan, in winter. Especially valuable along trout streams as shade and cover and as a secondary food source for beaver. (native to North America)

**GAMBEL OAK** ([\*Quercus gambelii\*](#)): Also called scrub oak and oakbrush. Very important for mast, browse, and cover. Acorns eaten by many species (esp. jays, wild turkey, squirrels, and bear). Important winter browse and mast for deer, bighorn sheep, and elk. (native to parts of southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico, including Colorado)

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## Deciduous Trees

**GREEN ASH** ([\*Fraxinus pennsylvanica var. lanceolata\*](#)): Most common on prairie, preferring moist areas. Of moderate importance to wildlife. The winged seeds (samaras) are eaten by a number of birds and mammals including wild turkey and rodents. Whitetail and mule deer browse the twigs and foliage. Biggest benefit is shade. (native to eastern North America, including watercourses in eastern Colorado)

**HONEYLOCUST** ([\*Gleditsia triacanthos var. inermis\*](#)): Has limited wildlife use but provides some songbird cover and is eaten by cottontail rabbit, squirrels, and deer. (native to central U.S.)

**BLACK LOCUST** ([\*Robinia pseudoacacia\*](#)): Seed eaten by bobwhite quail and squirrel. Showy flowers are favored by honey bees. (native to parts of eastern half of U.S.)

**ELM: Siberian** (*Ulmus pumila*) and **Lacebark (Chinese) ELM** (*Ulmus parvifolia*): Little value as a food source for game birds or mammals. Not sought by birds or mammals as a source of quality browse or cover, although it is used for nesting (esp. house sparrows and orioles). Seeds are eaten by songbirds, game birds, and rodents. (introduced, native to northern China and eastern Siberia)

**COTTONWOOD: Hybrid** ([\*Populus deltoides\*](#) var. *noreaster*) and **Narrowleaf** ([\*Populus angustifolia\*](#)): Need moist areas. Buds/catkins good food in winter and early spring. Bark, twigs, and leaves eaten by rodents, rabbits, deer, beaver, and porcupines. Provide forage for browsing wildlife such as whitetail and mule deer up through the sapling stage. Provide important nesting and roosting habitat for various species of birds. (native to North America)

**GOLDEN WILLOW** (*Salix alba* var. *vitellina*): Moist, fertile sites needed. Good browse food for big game, rabbits, and beaver. Provides forage for browsing wildlife such as whitetail and mule deer through the sapling stage. Provides important nesting and roosting habitat for various species of birds. (introduced, native to Europe, north Africa, and central Asia)

**HACKBERRY** ([\*Celtis occidentalis\*](#)): Fruit important winter food for songbirds (esp. waxwings, mockingbirds, and robins). Important for shade. About 45 wildlife species eat fruit, and deer browse on twigs and leaves. (native to eastern United States, including eastern plains of Colorado)

**LOMBARDY POPLAR** (*Populus nigra* var. *italica*): Limited wildlife value; some songbirds use for nesting (esp. English sparrows). (introduced from Europe)

**ASPEN** ([\*Populus tremuloides\*](#)): Very important browse in many areas for snowshoe hare, deer, and elk. Fallen leaves are avidly taken by deer in fall and early winter. Important food and building material for beaver. Grouse depend on buds for winter food. (native to North America)

**BUR OAK** ([\*Quercus macrocarpa\*](#)): Very important to wildlife. Acorns are very (possibly most) important wildlife food, especially in winter. Almost 100 wildlife species use oak; quail, turkey, deer, bear, and squirrels are especially avid acorn eaters; several species of upland and songbirds utilize for food and cover. Also excellent wildlife cover. (native to midwestern and northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada)

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## Coniferous Trees (Evergreens)

**PINE: Austrian** ([\*Pinus nigra\*](#)), **Scotch** ([\*Pinus sylvestris\*](#)), **Ponderosa** ([\*Pinus ponderosa\*](#)), **Piñon** ([\*Pinus edulis\*](#)), **Lodgepole** ([\*Pinus contorta\*](#)), **Limber** ([\*Pinus flexilis\*](#)), and **Bristlecone** ([\*Pinus aristata\*](#)): Pines are nearly as important as oaks. All parts of tree are used and/or eaten. Pine seeds are especially important for food. Bark harbors insects that woodpeckers, sapsuckers, and nuthatches eat. (Austrian and Scotch pine introduced from Europe; Ponderosa and lodgepole native to western North America; piñon native to western U.S. and northern Mexico; limber and bristlecone native to western U.S.)

**JUNIPER: Rocky Mountain ([Juniperus scopulorum](#)) and Eastern Redcedar ([Juniperus virginiana](#)):** High food value to songbirds, particularly grosbeaks and cedar waxwings. Important escape and nesting cover for songbirds and game birds. Use caution near apple trees as juniper is the alternate host for apple rust. (Rocky Mountain juniper native to western U.S. and Canada; eastern redcedar native to central and eastern U.S.)

**SPRUCE: Colorado Blue ([Picea pungens](#)) and Engelmann ([Picea engelmannii](#)):** Food value for grouse, and various finches including crossbills, siskins, nuthatches and by gray squirrels. Provide excellent nesting, roosting, and winter cover for numerous small birds. Deer will browse on blue spruce although it is not a preferred forage plant. (blue spruce native to Rocky Mountains of U.S.; Engelmann spruce native to western U.S. and Canada)

**DOUGLAS-FIR ([Pseudotsuga menziesii](#)):** Seeds used by blue grouse, squirrels, rabbits, and other rodents. (native to western North America)

**WHITE FIR ([Abies concolor](#)):** Prefer cool, moist sites. Moderate wildlife importance, mostly used for cover by mammals and game birds. Used for roosting and nesting by songbirds; seeds eaten by squirrels and blue grouse. (native to western U.S. and Mexico)

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This information was compiled from the publications and individuals listed below by [Kent Grant, Colorado State Forest Service, Durango](#), Colorado, January 1995 (rev. January 1997). “\*” denotes key contributors.

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