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WELCOMING BIRD FRIENDS INTO OUR GARDENS

Springtime gets us excited for our gardens to transition from a sleepy state to the beauty we cultivate. I love how each day I can walk through my community and private garden and see signs of life emerging. Spring is full of hope and new life.

In addition to plants, spring is a time when we see more bird friends return to our gardens and begin to nest to expand their families. This year I am blessed to have a robin choose my yard for her latest nest. A few weeks back I began to notice her hanging out in a planter on my fence, I was not sure at first if she was looking for food (worms) in the planter, but soon I saw her bring materials which clearly were meant to build a nest. How fun it was to peek at her work and see what would soon be home to her beautiful blue eggs.



If you want to attract more robins, consider their courtship cycle and places that are attractive for their nests. If the winter is a mild one, robins begin their courtship in January, but March is the usual mating season. Robins have been known to make nests in unusual places, including sheds, kettles, boots, hanging baskets, coat pockets, under car bonnets, in farm machinery, even on boats in daily use. It surprised me that she chose my yard because I have two large, active dogs who roam the area, but although she watches us all when we enter the yard, she seems to understand we will not harm her. Robins are



known to abandon a nest if they feel threatened, so to see her remain with us is a great joy! My husband and I took care to add a few more plant stands on the ground around the planter box, making it harder for the dogs to get near the planter holding the nest.

I was curious as to how long our friend would be with us. I found that the female will incubate the eggs for 13 days, and once hatched the female sometimes will eat the egg shells for some extra calcium. The chicks hatch naked, making them

totally dependent upon their parents. By eight days their eyes are completely open, and they are feathered usually by 10 days. The chicks are cared for by both parents for up to 3 weeks after fledging; after that the male will usually care for the young birds for about 14 days. At this time the female moves on to prepare the next nest. Robins usually have two broods a year. Interestingly robins do not get bothered about birds of other species being near their nest, and their parenting instinct is so strong that they have been known to feed chicks or fledglings of other species. The most regular recipients of this unexpected care are song thrush, blackbird, spotted flycatcher and willow warbler.

If you're looking to attract robins to your yard, it is not very hard, but there are some plants you can consider to increase your chances. Robins do not eat seed; most likely you'll find these birds rummaging through the soil in search of worms and grubs. In



addition the American robin is also known to eat wild fruits, such as mulberries and blackberries. If you have tall trees on your property this will attract robins, along with plants with heavy, thick foliage that help prevent predators from accessing the nest. The other night my husband noticed a crow trying to creep up on the nest when the mother had left temporarily; we were successful in shooing it away and protecting her eggs.

I am hopeful we will see these eggs hatch in the next week or so and watch from afar as the parents care for their young. As I peek out the back door they keep a close eye on me, perched sometimes on top of the bird feeder, or peeking out of the nest. I keep my distance and hope to add more plants to my garden to attract more birds and hopefully more nests to come!