

Notes from the Woods

Fall weather is finally arriving, though no frost yet in the last week of October. It has been a pleasure to work outside getting the gardens, lawn, and buildings ready for winter. Our chores have ranged from emptying or moving rain barrels, moving sensitive plants onto the solar porch, raking up black walnuts and dumping them in our back woods, to planting garlic for summer harvest. The hummingbird feeders are in, and suet and sunflower seed are deployed for our winter feathered friends. The flowers and sun on our solar porch and the colors and chirps of the birds help us survive the cold and grey of winter.

One thing you can do to help the winter birds is to take it easy on the fall yard work. According to a timely Audubon article, there are a few things to do or not do that will improve your winter bird habitat. Don't clip off the seed heads of native perennials because they provide nutrition directly and indirectly via insects the birds eat. Wait until early spring to clean up what's left. Create or augment brush piles as a repository for broken branches, shrub prunings, etc. They provide habitat for several species. We have one west of the house that provides a home for Carolina wrens, a cheerful vocalist.

Leave the leaves. Or at least most of them. I have a mulching mower, and do a last mow after most leaves are down. The clipped grass and ground up leaves fertilize the lawn. If needed, extra leaves can be composted or tossed onto your brush pile. Don't weed and feed the lawn. Mulching will do it, and pesticides can be harmful to wildlife and your kids. Do some fall planting of native shrubs for color and wildlife food, except deer which are grossly over-populated hereabouts. The best way to get details on these guidelines is to access www.audubon.org. On the homepage click on the search icon and type in "fall yard work".

Fall color is nice to enjoy, and can be useful. The bright yellow foliage of some oriental bittersweet growing in my woods alerted me to chop this dangerous invasive. It strangles trees. The bright yellow of native spicebush with its red berries is truly lovely. Take a walk on some of our township's wooded trails and look out for it.

Toni Robbi