

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

“The Robin, Harbinger of Spring”

The American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is a member of the Thrush family. The Pilgrim Fathers who first saw this native Thrush with the red breast were reminded of their much loved Robin Redbreast in England and gave the Thrush the name “Robin”. This beautiful bird is the state bird of Connecticut, Michigan and Wisconsin and has the reputation of being a reliable harbinger of spring as the flocks begin their northern migration in late winter. Males proceed females by a week or ten days in their northward journey to Canada and Alaska, they agreed upon breeding ground. Once mated, the female generally builds the cup shaped nest alone, using the materials the male has helped gather. The nest is made of twigs, cemented with mud, and lined with grasses. The three or four eggs are robin’s-eggs blue and are usually laid one a day in the late morning. A second and perhaps a third brood will be raised before it is time for the southern migration.

Robins are found all across America, from Florida to California and from Alaska to Newfoundland. They are found in parks, golf courses, fields, pastures, tundra, as well as in deciduous woodlands, pine forests, shrub lands, and forests that are regenerating after fires or logging. They are especially fond of manicured lawns in urban and suburban areas where they diligently search for earthworms. Robins appear to be listening for the worms underneath the soil when they cock their heads to the from side to side as they hop across the ground. In fact, they are looking for a slight movement in the soil to indicate the presence of their favorite meal. A Robin’s eyes are “fixed” in their sockets, so he must turn his head to see in different directions.

Although Robins are not typical “feeder” birds, they will occasionally eat bits of fruit and oil-type sunflower seeds. Their foods of choice are worms, larvae, beetles, spiders, assorted insects, fruits (especially cherries) and, evidently Possumhaw’s red berries. Robins stripped the berries on my two Possumhaw trees in one day. I will be planting several more female Possumhaws this spring for the benefit of the Mockingbirds, the Cedar Waxwings, and the beautiful Robins.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

