

## Haddam Garden Club

March 2026

Garden Blog Article

by Terry Twigg



### Ready, Set, Go!

In just a few weeks, the hours of daylight will once again balance those of darkness, and then slowly, slowly tip the scales toward longer days, warmer nights, and slips of green anywhere you look. If you haven't already done so, it's time to sort your seeds, planting the ones with the longest germination times now, with the rest soon to follow. It's almost time to start the earliest spring vegetables, as soon as the soil shakes off the thick white blanket it has worn so stubbornly this winter.

But as the earth approaches the equinox, we need to consider not only our own plans for spring, but the needs of the many creatures with whom we share our space, who are beginning their annual migration back from warmer southern refuges. Birds, bees, bats, moths, and butterflies are traveling toward their summer homes, where they'll serve as essential pollinators while decorating our gardens with their bright charms. What are you doing to welcome them?

Truly shocking numbers of birds die every year enroute north due to collisions with lighted human-made places. Office buildings, with row upon row of windows, brightly lit all night long, are particularly dangerous, so if you work in one, make an effort to educate the building's management. Point out that they can do a good deed while cutting their energy bills.

But there's a lot you can do at home, too. Lighted windows are the most obvious hazard, so close your curtains at dusk. Look around: The decorative lanterns you placed around your garden, the spotlight showing off that special tree, or the sheer disorienting effect of nightglow all take a toll on birds, including many beloved songbirds, as they travel to their summer nesting areas.

Turn off that porch light, or at least put it on a timer—or, better yet, a motion sensor. Lights along a path? Choose a style that points downward. In addition to birds, you'll spare thousands of moths. We often say that moths are attracted to lights, but that's not really accurate. Moths use light as a navigational cue. In the pre-industrial world, light at night only came from one direction—up—and safely guided the moths along their way. A bright electric light will trap them in a disorienting, fatal spiral. A creature with a lifespan of only a few weeks simply doesn't have the energy to survive an entire night of circling your lamppost. And when one moth dies, it takes with it the generations of moths it could have produced, many of which, as caterpillars, were essential soft food for baby birds.

Don't use bug zappers! They'll kill an occasional female mosquito (the only ones that bite) but at the expense of thousands of other beneficial insects. Unlike the 'good guys,' mosquitos aren't attracted to light, so all you're doing is reducing the numbers of pollinators and potential bird food. And the effect of the zapper is disgusting and unhealthy: insects coming in to contact with it explode into aerosolized fragments, which can be inhaled by anything breathing nearby, including you. Eww.

While overwintering birds need supplemental food in the cold months, they're better able to feed themselves in the spring, so continuing to offer seed after March is optional. For hummingbirds, however, who spend the winter down south and are just beginning their northern migration, it's almost time to set out feeders filled with sugar syrup. Most of them won't arrive here until mid-April or so, but there are always a few overachievers who arrive well ahead of schedule. And, of course, as climate change causes temperatures to rise earlier, the animal world responds by moving forward its travel plans. Even if they're just passing through, an ample food source may encourage them to change their plans and stay put, so you can enjoy them all summer. Caution: remember that sugar syrup will ferment, and the higher the temperature, the faster the fermentation, so keep the feeders clean and promptly discard spoiled syrup.

If you've been reading these articles for any length of time, you know what comes next: Don't allow chemical pesticides or herbicides anywhere near your garden! Every 'good' plant killed is a loss to the creatures dependent on it for food or shelter. Every 'good' insect killed poisons the bird or small mammal that eats it. Baby birds need 300-500 insects, mostly caterpillars, every day. Bats consume 6,000-8,000 mosquitoes or mosquito-sized insects every night. Don't destroy their food supply.

Lecture over. Put on your boots, go outside, and walk around your garden. Chances are, you'll see at least one tiny sprout braving the March winds. It's the reminder we all need at this time of year.