



Plants for Birds: **Rocky Mountain Juniper**

- **Scientific Name:** *Juniperus scopulorum* (Cypress Family)
- **Height:** 10 to 30 feet
- **Hardiness:** Zone 3
- **Wildlife Value:** Berries are excellent food for birds. Dense foliage provides cover and nesting sites. Foliage is browse for deer.

Rocky Mountain juniper is a native tree commonly seen in our western landscape providing both food and dense protective cover for birds and other wildlife. The female tree produces small blue berry-like fruits that cling to the tree in summer and winter nourishing birds during harsh weather conditions. These berries are a favorite of cedar and Bohemian waxwings, as well as Townsend's solitaires, robins, jays, and evening grosbeaks. The dense foliage of juniper provides needed shelter and the trees are frequently used as nesting and roosting sites for chipping sparrows, juncos, robins, towhees, yellow-rumped warblers and many more.

In the Rocky Mountains, juniper is known for its adaptation to dry areas. It grows on dry rocky outcrops, exposed bluffs, butte tops, draws, sagebrush and grass plains, stream terraces, and in open forests. Due to its extreme hardiness it is often used in making windbreaks and shelterbelts. Numerous cultivars have been developed in the horticultural trade and Rocky Mountain juniper has become a very popular ornamental tree in the garden for its attractive evergreen color. Large potted plants can be purchased or you can start small with bare-root seedlings and cuttings.

Rocky mountain juniper can grow from 10 to 30 feet high and 12 to 20 feet wide. It has scaly-like leaves and is dioecious meaning the pollen cones (male) and the seeded berries (female) grow on different trees. The berries are round, fleshy, are a bluish purple color and can persist on the tree for over a year. This species is hardy to zone 3 and thrives in moist loamy soils but also does well in dry, clay, and rocky areas. It is known to tolerate salts and a high pH. It needs full sun and does not tolerate shade. Rocky Mountain Juniper is an alternate host to cedar-apple rust so should ideally be planted away from apples, serviceberries, and hawthorne. It is also often browsed by deer so it may need fence protection when young.

Some species of birds absolutely need dense evergreens for nesting sites, protective cover from predators, and shelter from storms. Rocky Mountain juniper is a great addition to your backyard wildlife habitat. ~ *Leslie Eddington*

