

# The Robin

The Robin is probably the most easily identified and loved bird to visit Irish Gardens.



The Robin

**Scientific name:** Erithacus rubecula

**Irish Name:** Spideog

**Males:** The Robin is a plump bird with a bright orange-red breast, face, throat and cheeks edged with grey, a white belly and olive-brown upper parts. They have a brown bill and legs. Males and females are very similar. Some believe that they can be told apart by the brown on their heads. In males it is U shaped and in females it is V shaped though this is not always the case.

**Female:** The female shares the same characteristics as the male.

**Juveniles:** The juvenile Robin has speckled buff-brown upper parts and underparts. They have no red feathers so that adult birds do not attack them in territorial disputes. The speckled feathers are lost when the bird is about two to three months old.

**Song:** Robins are rarely seen or heard during midsummer (July-August) when they are moulting and become rather retiring. At other times they can usually be heard singing their melodious warbling song from perches, often quite high up. In the winter it can sound mournful, but around Christmastime the song becomes stronger and more passionate. They will also sing all through the night. This has been thought to be caused by streetlights making them believe it is still daytime. Others believe that they sing at night because it is quieter and their song can be heard. The alarm call is a loud ticking call.

**Length:** 13-14cm

**Diet:** The Robin's diet is made up of insects and worms which it normally catches by swooping. They will watch for movement on the ground and then swoop in to catch it. They will often follow a gardener when he is working picking up any worms that are exposed during digging.



In the garden, the Robin has a sweet tooth and often takes cake, especially fruit cake, coconut cake and uncooked pastry. At other times, sunflower hearts are eaten. Mealworms are a firm favourite, which they will often take from the hand.

**Breeding:** Robins will begin breeding in late March. They will lay between 3 and 9 eggs and these will be incubated for between 12 and 15 days. The smooth, non-glossy eggs are white or pale blue with reddish spots. Incubation is by the female only. The young are fed by both parents.

**Nesting:** The nest is made from grass, moss and dead leaves and is lined with hair and wool. It is usually built in a hole in a tree stump, bank or wall, but more unusual locations such as kettles, cars, and coat pockets have been used. An open-fronted nest box may be used by Robins.

**Interesting Fact:** Robins, both males and females, have their own separate feeding territories in the winter. They will defend these vigorously. By around Christmas, many will have paired up.

Many people believe that it is extremely unlucky to kill a Robin. Some people believe that the hand that kills a Robin will continue to shake afterwards. The Irish have traditionally believed that a large lump will appear on your right hand if you kill one, and in Yorkshire if the person owns cows then the milk will become blood coloured. Others say that whatever you do to a robin you will suffer the same. So if you break the eggs something valuable of your own will be broken. Flying in through an open window or tapping on the window is a sign of death being present. To see a robin sheltering in the branches of a tree indicates that rain is on the way & to see one chirping on an open branch indicates that fine weather is coming. Some believe that the robin will not be chased by cats. You should make a wish when seeing the first robin of the season, making sure that you are quick as if the bird flies away then you will have no good luck for the next twelve months.