

## WHY FEED WILD BIRDS?



Feeding birds can be a rewarding and enjoyable hobby. Even more important, you'll be providing much needed nourishment during the cold winter months when natural food sources can be hard to find. But before you rush out and buy a feeder, here are a

few hints and tips to make bird feeding safer for the birds and more fun for you. We've also included a few recipes that are strictly for the birds. Be warned, however, bird feeding can become addictive and, before you know it, you'll find yourself just having to buy "one more feeder!"

## BIRD FEEDING TIPS

Once you start feeding birds, keep it up until spring comes. Birds will depend on the food you supply and may have a hard time finding other food if you stop feeding them. This is particularly true if yours is the only feeder in the neighbourhood. It's especially important to keep feeders filled during very cold spells. Equally important – make sure the feeders are full at daybreak (you can fill them the night before) because birds need nourishment after a long cold night.

October is the time to start putting feeders out (if you haven't been feeding birds year-round). Natural food sources are becoming depleted and any nuts or fruit left on shrubs will be used up throughout the winter.

Keep your feeders clean as wet seeds spoil quickly and can become poisonous. Every so often empty, dry, and air out feeders. Never use commercial cleansers to disinfect feeders. Use hot water and scrub well.

If you are inviting birds into your yard, please consider their safety. Birds visiting feeders are placed at elevated risk of colliding with untreated windows. By treating your windows with highly visible, dense patterns, you reduce this risk. Bird feeders should be placed within a half a metre of windows or directly on the window to reduce the risk of collisions. Placing feeders near shrubs or trees will provide shelter and cover to reduce predation. Please keep your domestic cats indoors or closely supervised when outdoors.

Metal can become stuck to birds' feet during cold weather causing the flesh to tear. Avoid metal on seed and suet feeders, using plastic-coated products instead. If you

make a feeder from a hard plastic container, make sure you bind the sharp edges with tape.

Birds don't have teeth to chew their food, instead their powerful gizzard grinds seeds, nuts, and berries. But they need grit to help them with digestion. You can supply it by putting out packaged canary grit, finely ground egg shells, very fine gravel, or clean sand.

## KINDS OF FOOD

### Seed

There are many types of seed available, and certain birds prefer specific seeds. The most popular seed is sunflower, both the striped and black-oil type. Mixed seeds are also popular with feeder enthusiasts, but depending on the type of seed mix, much of it may be wasted. It's best to buy a good quality mix from a store specializing in bird feeding. Thistle or nyger seeds are favourites of finches, especially goldfinches and redpolls, and white proso millet is also highly palatable to many birds.



### Fruit

If you put out soaked dried fruit and fresh fruit such as currants, cranberries, oranges, and berries, you'll attract birds that don't often come to feeders — like robins.

### Suet

This attracts many insect-eating birds that are forced to change their diet to fruit and seeds during the winter. Avoid bacon fat, which contains too many harmful chemicals and use beef suet instead. You can buy commercially-prepared packages of suet, some with seeds, or you can make your own with suet obtained from a butcher. Melting the suet helps remove impurities.

Place the suet in a plastic-coated suet-holder, or smear it into the holes of a suet log. Don't tie it with string; birds' feet may become tangled in it.

## TYPES OF FEEDERS

Many different types of feeders are available, but most fall into several basic types:

**Hopper feeders** are the most common and can store a lot of seed which is released as it is used. They can be mounted on poles or platforms or hung from branches.

**Tube feeders** are cylindrical in shape and have several feeding outlets with perches. They can be hung from clotheslines, poles or branches and are best for chickadees, finches, and other small birds. Thistle or nyger feeders are similar but the feeder openings are mere slits allowing one tiny seed to be taken at a time.

**Platform feeders** attract larger birds such as jays, and can also be used to hold fruit and nuts. They can be mounted on poles at varying heights. Their base may be solid wood or, better still, plastic-coated mesh which lets rain fall through keeping seed drier.

### A WARNING ABOUT PEANUT BUTTER

Peanut butter warning. Many books list peanut butter as an appropriate food for birds. However, because it is so sticky they can choke on it. If you use it (and we do not recommend it), mix it half and half with wheat germ or melted beef fat. Too much peanut butter can also cause health problems for birds.

Limit the use of bakery products (bread, muffins, etc.). They are low in nutrient value and can cause malnutrition in birds that eat them too often.

## PREFERRED FOODS OF SOME COMMON BIRDS

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| ▪ Blue Jay         | peanut kernels, sunflower, seeds of all types         |
| ▪ Cardinal         | sunflower seeds of all types                          |
| ▪ Chickadee        | black-oil and striped sunflower seeds, peanut kernels |
| ▪ Common Grackle   | striped and hulled sunflower seeds, and cracked corn  |
| ▪ Dark-eyed Junco  | white and red proso millet, fine cracked corn         |
| ▪ Evening Grosbeak | sunflower seeds of all types                          |
| ▪ House Finch      | black-oil and striped sunflower seeds, nyger          |

- House Sparrow millet, canary seed
- Mourning Dove black-oil sunflower seeds, white and red proso millet
- Red-breasted Nuthatch striped and black-oil sunflower seeds
- Red-winged Blackbird white and red proso millet
- Song Sparrow white and red proso millet
- Starling peanut hearts, cracked corn
- White-breasted Nuthatch striped sunflower seeds
- White-throated Sparrow black-oil and striped sunflower seeds, white and red proso millet, peanut kernels

## SUET SERVING SUGGESTIONS

### Suet on a Stick

Mix melted suet with seeds and press it into a clean cardboard milk or juice container with the top removed or a plastic flower pot. Insert a long stick along one side. When the suet is hard, mount the container sideways outside (a birdbox with the front removed is a good site). Birds will perch on the stick while feeding on the suet.

### Suet Seed Pie

Heat to boiling: 1 part suet and 6 parts water. Add 2 parts cornmeal, half part flour, 1 part brown sugar. Cool, pour into a cupcake pan and allow to harden.

### OR

Melt half a pound of fresh ground suet in a saucepan. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, mix together 1/8 cup of canary seed, chopped peanuts, cooked oatmeal, and cooked rice, and 1/4 cup of raisins or currants, sunflower seeds, and fine cracked corn. Cool the suet until it starts to thicken, then add the dry mix and stir until evenly distributed. Pour the whole thing into a pie pan, mash into tree bark or cavities or pack it into suet feeders. NOTE: you can also use millet, other birdseed, dried fruit, and chopped berries. (From: How to Attract Birds. Ortho Books, 1983.)

## REFERENCES

Penland, S. and D. Gleisner. 1990. Winter Bird Feeding. Washington State Department of Wildlife.  
Wildlife Rescue Association of British Columbia, 1991. *Feeding the Birds*. Ortho Books, 1983. *How to Attract Birds*.

## GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE

Loss of natural space is a major factor in the decline of many plant and animal species. The Fletcher Wildlife Garden was established in 1990 to encourage the creation or restoration of wildlife-friendly gardens and plantings in urban and rural areas. The Garden includes a variety of habitats: two woodlots, an open field, an amphibian pond, a ravine, and a butterfly meadow that is also a Monarch butterfly waystation. Our Backyard Garden demonstrates local plants suitable for various growing conditions. Our website and publications explain how you can use local plants to attract and support local birds, butterflies, pollinators, and other creatures; how to deal with invasive plants; and where to find other helpful information.

The Fletcher Wildlife Garden is a project of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, which has an agreement with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for the use of the land. We also liaise with the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm.



45° 23' 12" N 75° 42' 15" W

Visit us online to read our blog and newsletters, view photo galleries, and learn about volunteering opportunities. Friend us on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/48901132335/>

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This brochure was redesigned with the support of the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.



# Fletcher Wildlife Garden

## How To

# ALL ABOUT FEEDING BIRDS

## TIPS AND TRICKS FOR FEEDING OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS.

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