

Winter Bird Feeding

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People enjoy watching birds year round especially in the wintertime. One may find endless pleasure in watching the birds feeding on a stormy day. To be assured of these visitors at close range, special feeds and feeders are highly recommended.

A sheltered open space 8 to 10 feet across, swept clear each morning before sun-up, will do nicely for the ground-feeding birds, such as cardinals, blue jays, juncos, grosbeaks, purple finches, pigeons, English sparrows, and the starlings. Coarser grains in mixture are suitable for throwing here--common wheat, cracked corn, sunflower seeds. Breadcrumbs may bring unwanted cats and dogs. Squirrels become a nuisance on the ground feeder and sudden snowfalls may cover food before it is eaten.

The best structures are covered stations, into which the birds can fly at any time, with feed dry and little danger from cats. These feeders are of many styles--for mounting on poles, window ledges, under eaves, or on a tree, or slung to move along a clothesline. The seed-cake type feeder is complete and requires only hanging and replacement when empty. Seed cakes contain preferred seeds and strained suet to the liking of many tree-feeding birds, such as chickadees, nuthatches, tufted titmice, hairy and downy woodpeckers, and other elusive species. Combination feeders, holding both a seed cake and dry mixed seeds, are attractive features for any garden.

Chunks of suet are useful in coarse-meshed onion or potato bags, hung in trees. Pheasants are attracted to whole corn ears. A constant supply of grit is needed for all birds when no gravel areas are open during the months of snow.

Cheap seed mixes contain a high percentage of corn and milo. Generally larger seeds attract larger birds, especially wild game birds. Sunflower seeds rank first preference of most birds, with hard red wheat, millet, hulled oats (or rolled), cracked peanuts and, if available, cracked buckwheat, all very acceptable. Seed balls contain only a coating of seeds over suet, and should not be confused with seed cakes, which have the better seeds heavily mixed throughout the suet.

Striped sunflower is a favorite of the colorful cardinal! Surely the most popular wild birdfeed to attract chickadees, grosbeaks, cardinals, blue jays, gold finches, nuthatches, cedar waxwings, etc.

Black oil sunflower a cold-weather feed for our feathered friends. Smaller black seed than the giant striped. This seed is high in oil and protein content to keep birds warm.

Thistle seed (Niger seed) if you are interested in a colorful show of gold finches, purple finches, and red polls, this is the feed to attract them to your yard. Cracked corn, is high in carbohydrates and vitamin A. Mix corn or other grains to your feed for ground feeding juncos, sparrows, doves, pheasants, quail, ducks, and blue jays. Peanut pieces are high in fats and carbohydrates. Add this cold-weather feed to your feeders to keep your feathered visitors warm.

Placement of these feeding stations is also a consideration since the hulls and droppings can be an issue especially the cleanup. The other item to consider is the seeds that are not eaten can grow up next year and they may not be the type of desired plant for that location. Then there is the attraction of less desirable wildlife.

Do not forget having water available in non-metallic birdbaths by using thermostatically controlled water warmers. There are those individuals who have installed small decorative ponds in their backyards. Some have heaters and shallow rocks next to the bank. This allows birds to have a drink all year long. The real benefit of these ponds is a year round water source but also can provide other year round pleasures.

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