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NATIONAL BIRD-FEEDING SOCIETY

Successful Winter Bird Feeding

Whether you are in South Carolina, Minnesota or New Mexico, winter months can be bone-chilling cold and filled with sudden storms. Although birds forage in the wild on their own, the presence of your feeders, clean and filled, is an important supplement to their sources of natural foods.

Tips for Winter Bird Feeding

- Fill your feeders every day, but put out only a quantity of seed that the birds can eat before sundown, especially where raccoons, bears or deer are a problem.
- Offer hulled seeds in a protected tube or hopper feeder. Try varying the heights of the feeders and spread them out so more birds can use them.
- When it's wet outside, limit the amount of seed on platform feeders to just a handful to avoid having soggy clumps that no one will eat.
- Stamp down the snow underneath the feeders to help the ground feeding birds, such as juncos, cardinals and doves. Clean up discarded hulls regularly. Removing debris gives the grass a chance to recover.
- Suet is nothing more than pure beef fat. It provides a great source of energy, for those backyard birds whose summer diet was mostly insects (woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches). Grind your own kidney beef suet, render it (simmer in a heavy pan with a 1/2-inch of water until melted), cool until hard and then re-melt what you need to make suet cakes.
- Putting the right things in homemade suet cakes is a matter of choice as long as nothing is used that could be harmful to the birds. One combination that has proven successful is: add to 3 cups of

softened suet 1-1/2 cups each peanut butter and corn meal and 3 to 4 cups wild birds seed. Pack into muffin tins until hard, then offer one "muffin" at a time to your feathered friends.

- For a winter project, let children smear pine cones with peanut butter, then roll them in bird seed and hang the treats from tree branches.
- Songbirds need water in any season for drinking and bathing, and all birds need to maintain a ritual of preening their feathers, even in winter. Bird baths make their life easier, and if they are heated they become a steady source of water when streams and rivers freeze.

Tips for All Seasons

- Bird feeding is an activity you can enjoy year 'round and every season has its special delights. Don't take down your feeders or you may miss out on the cardinals mate feeding in the spring and adult birds bringing their offspring in summer to learn how to get the seeds you provide.
- The most successful feeding stations have different styles of feeders, placed at different heights to simulate the way birds eat in the wild.
- Black-oil sunflower seed is the favorite of most seed-eating birds. Offer it from a hopper feeder to attract birds such as cardinals, jays, chickadees and grosbeaks.
- Nyjer seed will appeal to goldfinches as well as house- and purple finches and pine siskins. Serve it from a specially designed tube feeder with small holes adjacent to perches around it.
- Store seed in a clean, dry, air-tight container, such as a garbage can.
- To discourage squirrels and other mammals, use a pole-mounted baffle.

- "Clean" is the operative word for your feeding station. Stiff brushes and narrow spatulas are handy for scrubbing feeders and bird baths. You can use a mild bleach solution, 1/4 cup bleach to 2 gallons of warm water, but be sure to rinse well.

Solutions

- Without breeding birds we won't have feeding birds. To encourage nest building in your yard, put nesting materials atop bushes, over the clothesline or in the crotch of a tree.
- Put feeders far enough from your windows to give the birds turning room to avoid crashes as they fly off.
- To keep large birds from crowding out others, use a tubular style feeder with shortened perches and fitted with a saucer to collect spillage. For ground feeders, top a tray with a wire "cage" with spaces just wide enough to allow small birds through.
- A squirrel makes getting to your bird feeder its life work. If you omit even one step in taking necessary precautions, the bushytails will find it out in minutes. Try weighted, all-steel feeders, cage-within-cage feeders, stovepipe baffles surrounding the feeder post or serious peace negotiations: put out corn or peanuts in the shell on feeders designed just for squirrels.



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