

# Backyard Birding for Beginners

## Seeds

### Sunflower

In general, most mixtures contain fillers are not attractive to most birds and can lead to a lot of waste as the birds sort through the mix.

The most popular seed to be found is the black oil seed. They have very thin shells, easy for virtually all seed-eating birds to crack open, and the kernels within have a high fat content, extremely valuable for most winter birds.

### Safflower

These have a thick shell, hard for some birds to crack open, but is a favorite among cardinals. Some grosbeaks, chickadees, doves, and native sparrows also eat it.

### Nyjer Or Thistle

Small finches including American Goldfinches, Indigo Buntings and Pine Siskins, often devour these tiny, black, needle-like seeds.

### White Proso Millet

White millet is a favorite with ground-feeding birds including quails, native American sparrows, doves, towhees, juncos, and cardinals.

## Suet, Mealworms, and Other Bird Foods

### Suet

Suet is particularly attractive to woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, jays, and starlings. Wrens, creepers, kinglets, and even cardinals and some warblers occasionally visit suet feeders. Animal fat is easily digested and metabolized by many birds; it's a high-energy food, especially valuable in cold weather.

## Hummingbirds

### Feeding Hummingbirds

#### Directions FOR THE BEST HUMMINGBIRD NECTAR

- 1 cup of cane sugar
- 3 or 4 cups of water

Just dissolve the sugar in the water. No red food coloring! Natural nectar is colorless, and adding red dye to a hummingbird nectar recipe is simply adding one more chemical to the birds' food—a chemical they do not need. In the fall, wait until you haven't seen even one hummer for three weeks before taking your feeders down to reduce the risks of missing late migrants.

## BIG NO NO's

**Leftovers** - Not recommended. Putting out leftovers may seem like a way to avoid waste, but it's not usually a good idea for feeding birds in your backyard. **Bacon Drippings** - Not recommended due to preservative

**Bread** - People should be discouraged from feeding bread to birds, as there are far too many potential risks. Bread gets moldy quickly, and mold can pose a number of health problems for birds. Bread doesn't have much value as a food source, so when it's fed to birds on a regular basis, it can cause nutrient insufficiencies.

## TYPES OF FEEDERS

Your choice will depend mainly on the types of birds you want to attract. Feeding behavior differs by bird species, and some feeders tend to attract more of one type of bird than another. Feeders also differ in terms of maintenance requirements; when making your selection, consider how easy a feeder will be to clean and refill and how often refilling will be required.

### Tray or Platform Feeders

Perhaps the simplest of the feeder designs is a platform or tray feeder. Platform feeders have the advantage of being easy to clean, and they tend to attract a diversity of bird species. Their open construction makes viewing birds from all sides easy.

### Hopper or House Feeders

Hopper feeders are enclosed feeders that feed out seed at the bottom. Hopper feeders may hold several pounds of food and need not be refilled for several days.

### Window Feeders

Because birds stand directly in the seed while feeding, these feeders need to be cleaned and refilled daily.

### Tube Feeders

Tube feeders are hanging-type feeders that allow birds to feed through screens or ports.

## **Nyjer/Thistle Feeders**

Nyjer feeders are often tube-shaped and specially designed with tiny feeding holes to allow access only to small-beaked birds, such as finches.

## **Suet Feeders**

Cage feeders are the most popular type of suet feeder, and are typically made of coated wire for strength and easy cleaning.

## **Where To Put Your Feeders – seed, suet and nectar**

The two main things to keep in mind when deciding where to place your bird feeder are: can you see the feeder well, and is the feeder in a safe location.

## **NOW THAT YOU HAVE BIRDS COMING, HOW TO IDENTIFY THEM . . .**

Buy and use binoculars for a clear look and to aid in identifying your birds.

8 x 40/42 is most recommended for birding.

For new birders, use a pocket guide to get started, they're simple, clear and organized

Buy a field guide and mark the date you first identify a species. This will help you learn their names faster and increase your interest and enjoyment

## **SO, WHO IS AT YOUR FEEDER? How to start identifying birds . . .**

### **Start by grouping types of birds.**

In North America, some of the major categories that are easily recognized include

Perching Birds  
Woodpeckers  
Birds of prey  
Water birds

Paying attention to the location and the silhouette of a bird is the first step in identifying them.

There are 4 key things to remember when trying to id a bird:

Size and shape      Color pattern      Behavior      Habitat

Go through birds, noting field marking, size, shape, colors that stand-out, eyes that stand-out, wing bars . . . compare similar birds, noting the differences.

# Bird Trivia

## Weather

Birds are very attuned to changes in the weather and they can almost go in a feeding frenzy before and after a storm; this is survival instinct; they are loading up on available food while they can.

## Feeding Stations

Watch feeders, especially during nest season. Birds will drive their own species away from food, but let other birds eat freely. It is a form of survival, they know birds of their own type eat what they do, so they drive them off to protect their food source.

## Cats

It is estimated that cats kill between 1 – 4 billion birds each year. Sadly it isn't even for food, many times the birds are just left for dead. Hunting is just part of their nature.

## How do Birds Survive very cold Temperatures?

1. They hang out with other birds. – protection in numbers; helps in finding food sources;
2. They eat as much as possible when food is present.
3. They hunker down and fluff up their down feathers.
4. They stay out of the wind.
5. They roost in cavities.

## What should I do if I find a baby bird?

When there is a helpless baby bird lying on the ground, most people's first instinct is to try and help it. Many people don't realize that the vast majority of "abandoned" baby birds are perfectly healthy fledglings that don't need your help at all! If the bird is not injured, the best thing to do is to leave the bird where it is and to monitor it from a safe distance.

## What should I do if I find a sick or injured bird?

Best to just leave alone, might recover on its own, let nature dictate. Not a lot of options.

## What is wrong with my cardinals? They are bald. . .

The short answer is no one knows why it's bald, but this strange sight occurs every year, mostly in Northern Cardinals and Blue Jays. Birds molt their feathers throughout the year, and one possible explanation for

baldness is that an abnormal molt occurs on some birds, causing them to lose all of their head feathers at once.

### **If birds eat uncooked rice, can it swell up in their throats and stomachs and kill them?**

Lots of birds eat uncooked rice in the wild. Bobolinks, sometimes called rice birds, are a good example.

### **Can birds become dependent on bird feeders?**

Birds become accustomed to a reliable food source and will visit daily. However, birds search for food in many places, so if your feeder goes empty, most birds will find food elsewhere.

### **Will feeding birds in late summer stop their migration?**

A bird's migratory urge is primarily triggered by day length, and even an abundance of foods at your feeders will not make a bird resist that urge.

### **How can I stop woodpeckers from pounding on my house?**

**Visual deterrents** - Foil strips or reflective tape, hung from areas where damage occurs may scare away woodpeckers. The strips should be long enough to hang freely and blow in the breeze. Windsocks hung from house corners serve the same purpose as aluminum foil and may be less intrusive. Plastic owls hung from the eaves of a house will generally frighten off woodpeckers for the first few days.

#### **How to discourage squirrels from feeders**

Baffles or cones work for most pests; Slinkys also work for some people.

### **Hawks scare birds from my feeders**

There is no easy remedy. Take your feeders in for several days to see if the hawk moves on to a different location.

### **Bird Houses**

Put them up and hope for the best. It may take a season or two before they are used, but eventually they will be found. Plain, well-made houses are the best. Birds don't want their nests advertised.

### **Can I paint the inside of my birdhouses to help them last longer?**

Birds seem to be reluctant to use boxes with painted interiors, and additionally there is no good reason to paint the inside. On hot summer days, paint on the interior of the box can release potentially harmful fumes.