Provide nectar for hummingbirds. Make a sugar solution of one part white sugar to four parts water. Boil briefly to sterilize and dissolve sugar crystals; no need to add red food coloring. Feeders must be washed every few days with very hot water and kept scrupulously clean to prevent the growth of mold.

Store seed in secure metal containers. Store seed in metal garbage cans with secure lids to protect it from squirrels and mice. Keep the cans in a cool, dry location; avoid storing in the heat. Damp seeds may grow mold that can be fatal to birds. Overheating can destroy the nutrition and taste of sunflower seeds. For these reasons, it’s best not to keep seed from one winter to the next.

Discourage squirrels from consuming feeder foods. Squirrels are best excluded by placing feeders on a pole in an open area. Pole-mounted feeders should be about five feet off the ground and protected by a cone-shaped baffle (at least 17” in diameter) or similar obstacle below the feeder. Locate pole-mounted feeders at least ten feet from the nearest shrub, tree, or other tall structure. Squirrel feeders stocked with blends that are especially attractive to squirrels and chipmunks can reduce competition for high-priced foods offered at bird feeders. Locate squirrel feeders far from bird feeders to further reduce competition.

Locate feeders to reduce window collisions. In the United States, approximately one billion birds die from flying into windows each year. Reduce the risk of bird collisions by placing feeder less than three feet from a window or more than 30 feet away. Mobiles, opaque decorations, and fruit tree netting outside windows also helps to deflect birds from the glass.

Keep cats indoors. Cats kill hundreds of millions of birds annually in the United States, often pouncing on ground-feeding birds and those dazed by window collisions. Responsible and caring cat owners keep their cats indoors, where they are also safer from traffic, disease, and fights with other animals. Outdoor cats are especially dangerous to birds in the spring when fledglings are on the ground. Bells on cat collars are usually ineffective for deterring predation.

Clean feeders and rake up spilled grain and hulls. Uneaten seed can become soggy and grow deadly mold. Empty and clean feeders twice a year (spring and fall); more often if feeders are used during humid summers. Using a long-handled bottlebrush, scrub with dish detergent and rinse with a powerful hose; then soak in a bucket of 10% non-chlorine bleach solution, rinse well, and dry in the sun. In early spring, rake up spilled grain and sunflower hulls.
Bird Feeding Basics

While most wild birds rely on wild foods for most of their meals, more than 100 North American species supplement natural foods with birdseed, suet, fruit and nectar obtained from feeders. Bird feeding can benefit birds while also providing pleasure for people throughout the year. Feeders benefit birds most during the winter when natural food supplies are scarce. However, additional species visit feeders during the spring and fall migrations, and some nesting birds utilize feeders during the summer.

To keep birds coming back to your feeders, provide them with three essential elements: the right variety of quality seed, a source of fresh water for drinking and bathing, and ample cover, preferably provided by native plants. Native plants also provide potential nesting sites and a source of natural food.

Bird feeders also present risks, potentially increasing the chances of window collisions, predation, and exposure to disease. Following are some tips for safely attracting birds to your feeders.

Locate feeders at different levels. Sparrows, juncos, and towhees usually feed on the ground, while finches and cardinals feed in shrubs, and chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers feed in trees. To avoid crowding and attract the greatest variety of species, provide table-like feeders for ground feeding birds, hopper or tube feeders for shrub and treetop feeders, and suet feeders well off the ground for woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees.

Offer a variety of seeds in separate feeders. A variety of seeds will attract the greatest variety of birds. To avoid waste, offer different seeds in different feeders. Black oil sunflower seed appeals to the greatest number of birds. Offer sunflower seeds, nyger (thistle) seeds, and peanuts in separate feeders. When using blends, choose mixtures containing sunflower seeds, millet and cracked corn—the three most popular types of birdseed. Birds that are sunflower specialists will readily eat the sunflower seed and toss the millet and corn to the ground, to be eaten by ground-feeding birds such as sparrows and juncos. Mixtures of peanuts, nuts and dried fruit are attractive to woodpeckers, nuthatches and titmice. Relatively few species prefer milo, wheat, and oats, which are featured in less expensive blends.

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Suet feeding. Suet (beef fat) attracts insect-eating birds such as woodpeckers, wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice. Place the suet in special feeders or net onion bags at least five feet from the ground to keep it out of the reach of dogs. Although suet is particularly helpful during cold weather and migration when birds need extra fat reserves, “no melt” suet cakes are now available for use in warmer weather.

Mix peanut butter and corn meal. Peanut butter is a good substitute for suet in the summer. Mix one part peanut butter with five parts corn meal and stuff the mixture into holes drilled in a hanging log or into the crevices of a large pinecone. This all-season mixture attracts woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, and occasionally, warblers.

Provide fruit for berry-eating birds. Fruit specialists such as robins, waxwings, bluebirds, and mockingbirds rarely eat birdseed. To attract these birds, soak raisins and currants in water overnight, then place them on a table feeder, or purchase blends with a dried fruit mixture. To attract orioles and tanagers, skewer halved oranges onto a spike near other feeders, or provide nectar feeders.