

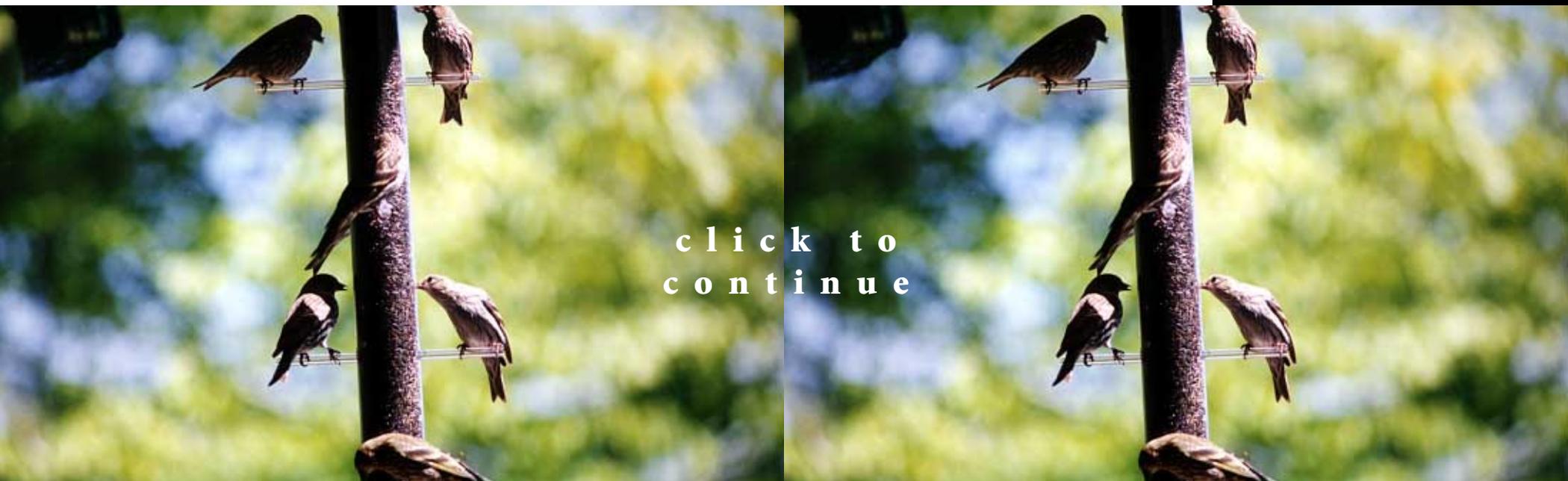


The Basics of Bird Feeding

GETTING STARTED IN THE BACKYARD

PUBLISHED BY

**National
Bird-Feeding
Society**



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The Basic Ingredients

The Main Course | Food

The first essential ingredient for starting a successful backyard bird feeding program is the right food. Our feathered friends, just like humans, have preferences about what and where they eat, and they will let you know if they approve of your menu. If they don't like what's there, they simply won't eat it.

Bird seed can be purchased in blended mixes or separately; the greater variety you offer, the more birds you may attract.

Place Settings | Feeders

To determine the best feeder system for the space you have available, think of the birds first. Functional feeders are ones made of durable materials that help keep the seed clean and dry. They also provide easy access for the birds and are easy for you to fill and keep clean.

Notable Potable | Water

Fresh water all year 'round is a critical element in any feeding program. Songbirds need a sizable quantity for drinking and bathing. Their feathers must be clean and efficient in order for them to keep warm.

Most birds prefer a water source far enough away from vegetation to allow a clear view of approaching danger, but close enough to seek refuge if it is needed. Vary the depth of water in bird baths from about two inches to quite shallow. Use flat rocks to make a standing spot for small birds.

Water will attract birds to your backyard that your feeding stations alone cannot. Species that favor a diet of insects or fruit may not have a reason to stop for a visit unless you offer a place for a drink or a bath.

The Perfect Spot | Shelter

Without any breeding birds, there won't be any feeding birds. Providing nesting sites and nesting structures as part of your landscaping helps to attract birds to your yard.

Because style and construction of nest boxes are similar, choose your design for a particular species. The key differences between houses are the size of the entrance hole and the interior dimensions. Whether you build or buy, choose durable, natural materials such as cedar, white pine or even exterior plywood.

Seeds for the picking

- **Sunflower seed** comes in striped and black oil varieties. Hearts, chips and kernels are sunflower seeds with the outer shell removed. Their advantage is they are 100% edible. More species can crack open black-oil than striped sunflower.
- Tan or white **safflower seed** is found in mixes as well as a single ingredient. Its biggest advantage may be that its bitter taste puts it close to the bottom of the preferred food list of eastern gray squirrels.
- **Millet**, the other white seed, is found in almost all bird food mixes. It has a slightly sweet taste, high protein content and comes in more than 100 varieties. The most common are red and white "proso."
- The newly trademarked name **Nyjer**[®] identifies a tiny black, oil-rich seed imported from Africa, India or Nepal. You may find it packaged as "thistle."



Common Questions

What if no birds come to my feeders?

Be sure that the seed you are using is the right kind for the birds you want to attract and that you have put it in an appropriate feeder. Also, it's important that the seed is fresh. Scatter some seed on a piece of aluminum foil and place that on the ground under your feeder. The sun glinting off the shiny foil may catch the birds' attention. Be patient. It can take several days, or even weeks, to attract birds to your feeders.

When's it best to take feeders down?

Never. It is reasonable to think that natural foods become abundant as the temperatures warm, but March and April can be the most stressful months of the year for birds. Food supplies in the wild are almost exhausted, new crops are not yet ripened and insects still are dormant. After young birds have fledged in early summer, the adults may bring them to your feeders to teach them how to find a snack there.

What seed is not attractive to pigeons?

Once pigeons locate your feeder, it can be hard to get rid of them. Take your seed feeders down for a week or two and leave up just suet holders and nectar feeders. To discourage them while still using seed, try sunflower seeds with hulls served from a hopper feeder with a tray under it. Keep the area beneath the feeder free of debris. The pigeons may give up when they no longer can find food.

Why Provide A Backyard Bird Buffet?

Every dawn brings a new day and with it the chance for another view of nature. Simply watching out your kitchen window brings you closer to the wonders of the world surrounding you.

One of the reasons that people put out food and water for wild song birds is to bring them into the backyard. If you are just getting started, all you need is a hopper feeder and a bird bath. Simply fill the feeder with black-oil sunflower or a quality mix and fill the bath with water. Add a well-baffled tube feeder, filled with a different kind of seed for small perching birds and a special tube with Nyjer seed for the goldfinches. It can be just that easy. And what do you get in return?

A flutter of wings fills the air, and you are greeted by a flash of color. The birds fly by, exhibiting their airborne acrobatics. They pause, pecking the ground in search of insects or hopping to the feeder for a seed sample. Then over to the "watering hole" for a drink and a quick bath and a chance to preen their feathers.

Each day is an opportunity to commune with your feathered friends. By providing the essential ingredients of food, water and shelter you have opened yourself to a rewarding, relaxing experience.

About the Society

The National Bird-Feeding Society provides thousands of people across North America with accurate, entertaining and unbiased information about the ways to become better friends to their backyard birds. The Society expands everyone's knowledge and pleasure while helping to make backyard bird feeding better



— for people and the birds.

One challenge in the new millennium is to broaden the Society's educational outreach and give more people the opportunity to make a difference for our fragile environment.

With your support, the Society will continue to help create bird-friendly habitat — one backyard at a time.

Tall, Thin Tube Feeders

Tubular feeders are long, slender containers, usually suspended from a tree or hung from a pole. Some models attach two or three tubes together, permitting more birds to feed and several types of seed to be offered at the same time.

There are rugged designs that come with lifetime warranties against squirrel damage. Simple assemblies make cleaning less of a chore.

What seeds to use

Tubular feeders may have either tiny openings to dispense Nyjer® seed or larger holes for sunflower or a mix. Some are designed with interchangeable fittings that give you flexibility in the choice of seed to use. Upside-down feeders, which are tubes with perches above the feeding holes, are made specifically for the acrobatic goldfinches that have no problem eating head down.

Most tubular feeders have separate perches far enough apart to reduce some of the competition that often occurs around the feeding station. Small perches and portals make it difficult for larger birds to use these feeders, which can be an advantage if you're trying to be selective.

An innovation in tubular feeders is the design that surrounds the tube with a plastic-coated wire cage. The spaces are wide enough for small birds to hop in and out easily to reach the seed but too small for larger birds or small mammals to get through.

Tubular models often come with reinforcing around the feeding portals or attached trays to reduce damage and spillage.

Filled with sunflower seeds, tubular feeders will attract chickadees, titmice and nuthatches that generally take one seed at a time and fly off to eat it elsewhere. Goldfinches, purple and house finches and pine siskins, on the other hand, will stay on a perch and continue to feed for several minutes at a time.



goldfinches



Also see:

Droll Yankees
www.drollyankees.com

Vari-Crafts Inc.
www.vari-crafts.com

The Importance of Maintenance

All feeders should be cleaned regularly. A glance into the feeding tray, or an absence of birds, can indicate that seed may have gotten wet and probably moldy. Regular cleaning reduces the chance for spreading parasites and disease around feeding stations where many birds congregate. For the same reason, it is important to keep the area beneath the feeder clear of old seed. Most feeders can be emptied and washed with a mild soap, touch of bleach and warm water mix. Then allow the feeder to dry thoroughly before refilling it.

Short, Squat Hopper Feeders

People have utilized an endless variety of things as bird feeders over the years, from hubcaps to milk bottles. Due to its straight-forward simplicity, the traditional hopper feeder often is the one people choose when they first start feeding the birds.

As the name implies, a hopper feeder is a box-like storage and dispensing system that not only makes seed available for birds on demand but usually has a roof to help keep seed dry. It stores seed and automatically replenishes it in the feeder port, usually through gravity. Hoppers are available in many styles and shapes, including square, partially enclosed or Swiss-chalet style.

With glass on one or two sides, it's easy to tell when more food is needed in a hopper feeder. In wet weather, check every few days to make sure seeds haven't gotten soaked. Hopper feeders almost always are top-loading. Simply open the lid and pour in the food, after cleaning out any soggy debris. Different models can hold anywhere from a quart to a couple of gallons of seed. Depending on the bird traffic, a hopper may go a day or several weeks before it needs to be refilled.

What seeds to use

Most any variety of seed, from straight sunflower or safflower to a mix, can be fed through a hopper. Major exceptions might be black Nyjer® seeds, sunflower chips or a combination of the two because of their small size. These tend to fall or be knocked to the ground more easily than the larger, heavier seeds.

What birds prefer them

Hopper feeders not only permit several birds to feed at one time, they accommodate a wide variety of species, including cardinals, jays, chickadees, titmice, sparrows, grosbeaks, purple and house finches and nuthatches. No gymnastic feats are required for birds to use a hopper, and even mourning doves may feed on models with a spacious feeding platform.

Advantages

Hoppers come in many varieties, are widely available and can be purchased economically. They hold large quantities of seed and are easy to place where it's convenient for you to refill them. Many types of hoppers are made of wood, which many people prefer because it tends to blend harmoniously in a backyard environment.

Disadvantages

Wood and inexpensive plastic models will not long survive squirrel attacks. And sooner or later, the plastic will cloud, craze or crack if placed in the sun. Because of their open tray, hopper feeders allow substantial spillage. Birds looking for more desirable seeds in a mix can easily kick out onto the ground what they don't want. You can control this somewhat with a tray or screen hung beneath the feeder or some sort of collection apparatus on the ground.

rose-breasted grosbeak



Also see:

Duncraft
<http://www.duncraft.com>

Heath Mfg.
<http://www.heathmfg.com>



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Nature of Nectar

No backyard bird feeding station is complete without feeders to attract those tiny flying jewels, hummingbirds, and the equally resplendent orioles.

In the wild, hummingbirds have two major sources of food: flower nectar and small insects, such as gnats and spiders, which provide protein. They pick their insects from flowers or grab them out of the air as they dart around looking for nectar.

Hummingbirds readily use a nectar feeder, and since ninety percent of their time is devoted to finding nectar, you really should have one or more of these specially designed feeders in your yard.

There are two basic feeder styles: saucer and vacuum (left). The latter comes in a wide range of capacities, materials and designs, and is easily hung from a tree limb or pole. It also can be mounted directly to the outside of a window. Saucers (top right) are basin feeders covered with a lid with several feeding ports. The lid lifts completely off for easy cleaning. When you shop for a new hummingbird feeder, look for:

hummingbird

Capacity

Choose a feeder that matches the number of hummers available to feed in your area. Larger sizes may be tempting, but it's better to start with a smaller feeder to reduce waste and the likelihood of the nectar going bad.

Perches

Hummingbirds are so acrobatic they can eat on the fly. A perch is not required in order to dine. However, a perch may offer an incentive to hang around. Perches should be spaced about 1½ inches from each feeding port to accommodate most varieties of North American hummingbirds.

Materials

Hummingbird feeders usually are made from plastic or a combination of glass and plastic, the variable being the nectar container. Glass containers are more durable and scratch resistant, but plastic won't shatter if it hits the floor.

Fill the feeder with a commercial hummingbird food or a simple nectar solution of one part white, granulated sugar to four parts water. This ratio approximates the sugar content in many flowers that hummers favor. It isn't necessary to add red coloring since

hummingbird feeders have varying amounts of red on them, which may initially attract the birds.

You will be doing lots of filling and cleaning because nectar should be changed every two to three days, especially in hot weather. Make sure the feeders you purchase come apart easily so you are able to thoroughly clean them. Re-assembly needs to be tight to avoid leaks that can attract bees and ants.

There really is no limit on where you can locate a hummingbird feeder, even an apartment balcony or office window. But just because you put it up does not guarantee its use. If you do not see hummingbirds in local gardens or neighboring parks, they may not be in your area.

However, it could simply take a little time to establish your feeding station among resident birds, or you may live where you will have them only during migrations.

Avoid hummer wars

Hummingbirds are very territorial and don't like to share your nectar with other hummers. This can limit the visitors to your feeder. If you want to attract more, add more feeders. Place them out of view of each other, or so close to each other that no individual hummingbird can possibly defend them all.

You will have the best results if you get your feeders out first thing in the spring, but don't hesitate to put them out in mid-summer. Then, as the weather gets cooler, continue to feed through the fall until the hummingbirds no longer visit. That's the indication that the local population has gone south and the migrant birds also have passed through your area.

For orioles only

Orioles have become such constant visitors to hummingbird feeders that manufacturers now produce large capacity feeders with orange, instead of red, colored parts.

If you plan to use an oriole feeder, choose one that includes similar features to the hummingbird feeder such as an ant moat and bee guards. Start early to catch the migrating males, enticing them first with fresh orange slices set out close to the nectar feeder. The same mixture of sugar and water that you use for hummers will work for the orioles as well, or use a commercially available orange flavored nectar.

Sometimes it seems like a lot of fuss and bother. But when the first fascinating hummer or gorgeous oriole shows up for a snack, you'll realize all your efforts were well worth it.



oriole



ADD 2 IT Bee guards and ant moats

Bees and ants are attracted to the same sugar-water mixture as hummingbirds, creating a nuisance and even fouling the nectar. Stop ants by putting a barrier, such as a water-filled moat, between the ants and the nectar. Bees and wasps have short mouth parts, so bee guards over the end of the feeding tubes interfere with their reach.

Also see:

OPUS Inc.
www.opususa.com

Perky Pet
www.perkypet.com

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[HTTP://WWW.BIRDFEEDING.ORG/JOIN.HTML](http://www.birdfeeding.org/join.html)



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Building Castles in the Sky



tree swallows

to have their own, specific ideas of what will make an acceptable home. And it is frustrating because, even though you “build it” they “may not come.”

What we are talking about are nest boxes, also known as bird houses and which may become roosting boxes in cold weather.

What are nest boxes?

These are structures that come in a purposeful variety of shapes and sizes that take the place of natural cavities, which are in ever-shorter supply.

Many cavities are created by woodpeckers, which excavate new holes every year. These subsequently are used by wrens, flycatchers, swallows, bluebirds, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches and others.

A big problem for cavity-nesting native species is European starlings and house sparrows. Introduced into the eastern United States more than a century ago, they compete fiercely for nest holes.

What about design?

Constructing bird houses can be an educational family project, easy to do with plans found in magazines, books and on the Internet.

The real problem gets back to the persnickety birds. Not just any place will do. Whether buying or building, your first step is research.

What cavity nesters live in your neighborhood, and which of these would you like to have come live in your yard? Each probably likes a box of a different configuration. Variations include floor dimensions, interior height, location and size of the entrance hole, and distance off the ground.

Cavity-nesters can come and go using only the entrance hole for footing; do not add exterior perches, which only aid predators. But it is helpful if, on the inside beneath the hole, grooves are cut into the wood or hardware cloth is attached to help nestlings get up to the hole.

What are they made of?

Bird houses come in an endless variety, but usually only to appear

decorative to humans. The birds would prefer something plain and functional, without a fancy paint job. The best material probably is untreated 3/4-inch-thick wood. Exterior plywood or pine are all right, but cedar will last longer.

What about heat and air?

Wood is among the best year-around insulating materials. The temperature inside a bird house sitting in the sun can be 20° hotter than outside. Anything over 107°F. can be too much for either eggs or nestlings.

To help keep the heat down, a nest box should be ventilated with holes drilled near the top, or sides that are shorter than the front and back. This also provides light...an adult bird in the hole otherwise cannot see much of anything inside. To avoid floods, there should be drainage holes in the bottom.

During the winter, a number of birds may huddle in a nest box, roosting together to keep warm, and survive.

When and where?

Nest boxes can be put up as early as January; non-migratory cavity nesters such as titmice and nuthatches look for potential sites throughout the winter. But it's never too late because nest box use often is a result of supply and demand.

Because birds are territorial, you may not be able to host more than a single pair of any one species. An alternative is to hang different types of boxes at the preferred height for each, to hopefully attract other species.

Boxes should be placed out of direct sunlight, if possible, with the entrance hole facing away from the prevailing wind and rain.

Do we look in?

If you are fortunate enough to have “renters,” then you have some responsibility for their well being. This means looking in on them from time to time to make sure that everything is all right.

Your nest box should have a swing-open side or back, to simplify inspection. Except when birds actually are sitting on eggs, you can and should slowly and quietly open the box to check if the situation looks okay. Once a week is sufficient, and an inspection should be completed in 30 seconds. If there are nestlings, look in while the adults are away finding food.

What about pest problems?

The most common urban predator is the house cat, but raccoons, opossums, skunks, snakes and even squirrels can be problems. The most effective anti-predator approach is to mount a three-foot-wide baffle on the pole below the nest box. A 3/4-inch-thick block of wood also can be fitted around the entrance hole, to increase the reach needed by a four-footed predator.

Parasites include fire ants, wasps, nest mites and blowfly larvae. If the latter are present, you should pick them off nestlings. Under no circumstances use pesticides.



WHEN²DOIT

Put up a nest box anytime. Birds inspect them throughout the year for future use. Many birds roost in boxes during winter. Although most boxes are used for breeding in spring, many species have second broods and need them in late summer.

Also see:

Coveside
www.coveside.com

Nestbox Plans
www.birdfeeding.org



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The Birds-Eye reView

The Story of Bird Feeding

Learn how a Swap Story with redlin. Anecdotes are pictured on walls of the museum. Birds are welcomed to roam on village roofs in Kazan's Europe. In the first part people are fed for birds and in the Old Testament it tells of having husband aware of the harvest for the birds to glean.

Do heronchi this activity we know as backyard bird feeding begin?

When did it become a "big" business? What is the fascination of the hobby? Why do people start in the first place? And who are the enthusiasts?

In this new issue, we will explore the early days of backyard bird feeding, and how an entire industry grew up around a unique hobby. We'll look at the 18th century of feeding seed in a single seed. Looker being from the perch to creating a landscape that resembles his natural habitat. Another natural bird that generates an extraordinary bird garden started by their parents in a time when the natural world.

There is a story that in the beginning a miller's wife swept out the red line was eating and the next morning she discovered dozens of birds feeding on the sweepings in the mill yard. She tried to feed her husband, thinking "I've just invented a new successful practice. I called bird feeding." page 4

The Green Observer

Remember this in December," said my husband's friend, as he placed a bowl of fresh, wet, and slippery on the breakfast table. Our common red-wings, and the year's crop, even until late October, were plentiful. We think that winter's common table food

and our highest winter contribution to a glorious year. Some of the pale young larvae were picked clean by the birds. Even though we have to share, our care the bird and we continued to harvest.

It was then that we stopped our sharing of seed. Instead for several months, but they are up and ready for winter visitors. The Japan was beautiful when we saw two years planted and have produced a morning's harvest of the purple birds. I was unable to see which birds will feed their body. We have had, and it is of course, the same table for winter. Several winter birds in that year's table. The past winter, most a new harvest!

Remember, and the heronchi loved them. The bird in the. The unique perches of our country, observed by the use of seed, leaves and buds, gradually shaped each region's lack of resources. Our Utah family reports that the growth of their city is spectacular, availability of water being the critical element.

Our vegetable garden was not successful. And after that one day in August, a bird catcher's show ran to the bird's window. I could not imagine what was causing me such pain. An enormous flock of goshawk had descended on the yard, swooping, and screaming and flying over my head. The birds had paid?

HELPING CREATE BIRD-FRIENDLY HABITAT — ONE BACKYARD AT A TIME

Serving Suet & Such

Suet

An important part of your year 'round feeding program is suet, either commercially packaged cakes or fresh from the butcher. The easiest way to serve it is to hang up plastic-coated wire baskets that flip open on one end. Expect woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees to come in all seasons. Wrens, creepers, titmice and even some warblers also may visit.

Salt

Mineral matter such as salt appeals to many birds, including evening grosbeaks, pine siskins and common redpolls. An easy way to provide it is by pouring a saline water solution over rotted wood until crystals form.

Fruit & nuts

An occasional apple, banana or orange or a handful of soaked raisins livens up your feeding station. Scatter fruit on an open tray or impale large chunks on tree branches. Unsalted peanuts in the shell are a protein source for strong-billed blue jays; shelled peanuts attract juncos and white-throated sparrows.

Also see:

C&S Products
<http://www.cs-prod.com>

Birdola
<http://www.birdola.com>



red-bellied woodpecker

Birdie Granola Bar

1/2 cup chopped rendered suet
1/2 cup peanut butter
2-1/2 cups corn meal
1 cup mixed bird seed

Combine ingredients and press into a pan. Freeze until firm. Crumble. Mix the crumbles with some peanuts, birdseed, chopped apples, raisins and more chunks of suet. Divide into single-serving containers and freeze.

Birdie Cookie Dough

1 cup flour
1 cup shortening
1 cup peanut butter
4 cups corn meal

Mix everything together as you would cookie dough with an electric mixer and store in the refrigerator. To use, simply pack into suet feeders.

Birdie Raisin Cake

1 cup corn meal
1 cup uncooked oatmeal
1 cup flour
1 cup wheat germ
1 cup raisins
1 cup skim milk (dry milk is ok)
1/2 cup shortening or lard

Mix all ingredients to form a thick batter. Grease and lightly flour a cake pan. Bake at 350° for an hour. Cool; break into medium-size pieces. Place chunks in a suet basket.

Finishing Touches

Once birds have accepted your backyard habitat, add a window feeder (*below*) in order to enjoy close-up views of your favorite visitors. Clear acrylic styles in various sizes stick with suction cups to panes of glass and have lift-out trays for easy filling and cleaning.

A traditional window shelf feeder is simple to make from a 3/8-inch thick board. Brace it tightly, level with the window sill, and add a 1 1/2-inch strip of wood to the three outer sides to keep the seed from blowing away. Put a 10- to 12-inch-high upright at either end for suet cake holders. Even the normally shy cardinal may come to a window feeder filled with sunflower or safflower seed.

"High-tech" window feeders separate you from the birds by scarcely the thickness of a window pane. It's all done with mirrors, built-in for one-way viewing so you are able to get close without disturbing the birds. These feeders, usually made either of cedar or acrylic, have weather-proof seed chambers and mount to windows with suction cups or Velcro®.

Pine siskins, chickadees and goldfinches are quick to discover a seed sock (*right*), designed exclusively for the tiny black Nyjer® seed. It is simply a narrow mesh cloth sleeve about a foot long that can be hung just about anywhere. The birds land on it to pick out the seeds through the small openings in the mesh.

Not enough trees with low limbs in your yard from which to hang feeders? Is the area limited in which to place both feeders and bird baths? The answer to your dilemma may be poles, hangers, hooks and mounts. Manufacturers have come up with a dazzling array of accessories to help you create an ideal feeding station despite any limitations of your outdoor area.

Attractive iron poles clamp to any railing so you can hang a suet basket, a tubular feeder or wooden feeder from your deck or porch. Screw clamps adjust the mounting bracket for a perfect fit. Poles can be configured to hold one or more feeders and can be extended as much as four feet to the side to take advantage of even the most limited space.

Options for the middle of the yard include an adjustable pole (*below*) that can be pushed into the ground or fitted into a post socket. It is possible to add multiple crooks to poles as well as brackets to hold suet baskets and mealworm trays.

Live food such as mealworms can perk up the activity level at your feeding station. The larvae of a flour beetle, mealworms are a clean, dry and odorless high protein supplement to birds' carbohydrate-rich seed diet. They have a reputation for attracting bluebirds, but most wild birds will snatch these tasty morsels from feeders. Put them in a window tray or on a dish with sides high enough to restrict the wriggly creatures. They are easily stored in the refrigerator and have a "shelf life" of several weeks.



window feeder



mesh bag



The Bird's-Eye reView

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Water: the Simple Secret

Making water available may be the most effective way to attract birds to the backyard. The need for and attraction of open water any time of the year is so strong that many species that do not visit seed feeders will show up just for the water. These could include bluebirds, robins and other thrushes, warblers, tanagers and flycatchers.

Birds must drink year 'round to avoid dehydration, and because they do not have salivary glands, they need water for digesting food. Water also is necessary all year to maximize feather maintenance. A bath, followed by careful preening, keeps feathers functioning to help regulate a steady body temperature.



robin

under cover of trees or patio roofs will improve security if hawks are present in your neighborhood.

The bath should be reasonably close to trees or shrubbery to provide an easily reached perch to preen in safety. The bath should be away from any feeders.

Also see:

GardenBuilt.com
www.gardenbuilt.com

Avian Aquatics
www.avianaquatics.com

Where's the bath?

As important as putting water out is where to place it. The most natural position is close to the ground, but you may want to compromise on the elevation in order not to expose the birds to cat attacks. Remember that birds that are soaked are no match for the quickness of a cat or the stealth of a hawk. Locating the bath

present in your neighborhood. The bath should be reasonably close to trees or shrubbery to provide an easily reached perch to preen in safety. The bath should be away from any feeders.

Bird baths can be as simple as the clean lid of a plastic or galvanized steel trash can or as elaborate as a ceramic bowl atop a decorative pedestal. The best ones have a gradual slope and are no deeper than two to three inches. Birds like to stand in the water as they bathe and actually seem to prefer a non-slip surface. Even bathtub or shower non-slip strips help.

When it gets cold

"Water, water everywhere and nary a drop to drink," as the ocean-bound mariner lamented, often applies to birds in winter, especially in the North. Although birds are able to convert snow to water if creeks and ponds are frozen, that uses up some badly needed energy.

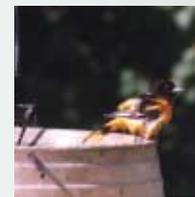
Providing water in winter can mean, for much of the time, keeping it above freezing.

Among your options:

- To refill with warm water to thaw the ice.
- A covered, insulated solar-heated bowl that keeps water from freezing down to 20°, as long as it's in the sun. Birds can drink, not bathe, through a hole in the cover.
- Some variety of heater, either an immersion type or a bird bath with a heating coil built into the base. These work fine down to about -20°, and most also have a thermostatic turn-off in case the water container either runs dry or gets tipped over. Remember that a concrete or ceramic bath may crack when water freezes in it, especially if it has a lip.



cardinal



oriole

Consider a dripper

Other options exist for those in the deep South and Southwest, and the rest of us once spring returns. You will be amazed — and very entertained — by the bird antics produced by the addition of a dripper. Titmice, chickadees and goldfinches will perch right on the dripper spout and lean over to take a drink.

A mister is another option, especially if you have hummingbirds around. Birds tend to "come running" when they hear the sound of moving water. And the hummers, along with some other small birds, love to fly through a mist or bathe among wet leaves.

Build a water garden

You can go all the way and create a water garden, perhaps with a re-circulating waterfall, pond or creek complete with water pumps, drippers, misters and landscaping. A reliable water source not only draws significant numbers of birds, it makes your yard an attractive nesting habitat. During the summer you may have visits from adult birds bringing their fledglings for a drink or bathing lesson.

When bath becomes swamp

It is amazing how crummy the water in a birdbath can become. You wouldn't think birds would get so dirty, but some species in particular spend a lot of time digging around in the leaves and garden searching for prey. A bath quickly can become fouled with leaves, defecation, feathers and debris.

A birdbath can be cleaned on a regular basis with just a blast from a garden hose, before refilling with clean water. Once in awhile — you can tell simply by looking — the bath will need to be scrubbed with a stiff brush.



TIP2DOIT

For stubborn algae (which can even grow in the winter), mix about one part bleach to nine parts water and scrub. Rinse thoroughly before refilling. If lime deposits are the problem, a soaking with vinegar should do the trick. Rinse thoroughly.

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mourning doves



Squirrel Management

Feeding birds is a most enjoyable backyard activity, but there is one aspect that can fill even the most mild-mannered person with rage: squirrels! If you're ready to pull out all the stops, there are plenty of new weapons on the market.

Thanks to technology and some inspired inventors, feeders are designed specifically to (perhaps) stop squirrels in their tracks. The arsenal includes weight-balanced feeders, cage-guarded feeders and mild shock treatment feeders.

What is perhaps the "granddaddy" of squirrel resistant feeders is a classic hopper style turned squirrel barrier. The all-steel body is impervious to squirrels, and the counter-balanced perch determines who will eat there. Adjustable settings let people select, according to weight, the birds they hope will come; the perching platform drops down when anything heavier lands, sometimes tipping the intruder to the ground.

Squirrels be warned

Electric shock may sound extreme, but some feeders are "wired" just enough to deter squirrels. One hanging style works by giving intruders a mild shock from a 9-volt battery. Another design employs solar cell technology to give off a mild electrical current. It is strong enough to startle squirrels, but goes undetected by birds.

Because birds' feet are composed of cartilage with no sweat glands, they're nonconductive, and birds don't get shocked.



Baffles are effective only if your feeder is at least eight feet from the nearest place from which a squirrel can jump.

Baffling the beasts

For those who aren't ready to give up their existing feeders, adding stovepipe baffles and metal or plastic shields will help protect your old favorites. Using a baffle when you mount or hang a feeder stops things that climb up or down (raccoons, squirrels and 'possums) before they reach your feeders. Properly positioned, baffles exclude the unwanted without interfering with the function of the feeding station.



Feeders can be encased in a chicken-wire mesh cage for protection (*left*). This also helps discourage large birds from raiding the feeder.

Society member Don Thornburg arranged garden netting around the base of his feeder pole, secured with only a "twist tie." He hasn't had a squirrel on his bird feeders since.

A useful squirrel guard that has a tilting baffle made of clear plastic comes with hardware for suspending a feeder. Stovepipe baffles attached to a pole beneath the feeders work well as long as your pole is six feet high. Grease on the pole will work for a while. But it shortly turns into a gummy mess.

Of course, some people say if you can't beat the pesky critters, join 'em. Which is the concept behind feeders and food made for four-footed visitors.

Being both inquisitive and playful, squirrels seem to love the challenges of the various gizmos that people use. Available are squirrel swings, squirrel munch boxes, squirrel table and chair feeders, and twirling wheels on which to impale ears of corn. The squirrels' only concern seems to be, once they've finished one ear, that another be installed in its place. Install the gizmo some distance from your bird feeders. It often helps to draw squirrels away.

To deter raccoons from the squirrels' corn, string a wire between two trees and hang the corn from it. Squirrels easily get across the wire and hang on to the corn, but the 'coons may find it too difficult.

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Since squirrels have all day to defeat your feeder defenses, and you have only moments to recreate them, the winning move may simply be to feed them also.



Also see:

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<http://www.havahart.com>

Heritage Farms

<http://www.heritagefarms.biz>



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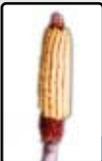
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WHY2DOIT

A recent survey by the National Bird-Feeding Society showed that 65% of respondents fed squirrels in their yard.

Why did they feed them?
 Fun to watch 38%
 Love 23%
 Need 20%

What did they feed them?
 Corn 41%
 Seed 27%
 Nuts 25%



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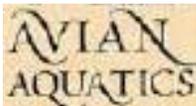
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