

Backyard Bird Feeding Basics

The more you can provide from this list, the more successful you'll be.

1. Variety of food types - various seeds during winter, but especially black oil sunflower; others include safflower, millet, thistle, cracked corn, striped sunflower
2. Quality food (replace supplies yearly and spend a little more for quality)
3. Feeders that provide several perches or feeding stations (more 'seats' at the table)
4. Protection from weather and wind
5. Proximity of shrubs/trees which can shelter birds from predators
6. Proximity of nearby perches where birds can wait their turn at the feeders
7. Presence of water!!
8. Winter bird feeding season is from November 1 through April 1 (at minimum); summer feeders can be placed out from May 1 through September 30.

Types of feeders:

1. Gravity feeders – hanging or post-mounted feeders which provide a continuous supply of seed over several days and protects seed from weather and 'seed predators' such as squirrels.
2. Open Shelf feeders – above ground, with or without a roof.
3. Ground feeders – easiest to set up, but limited to ground-feeding birds.
4. Suet feeders – hanging or permanently affixed-usually consist of a wire mesh of some sort. These provide high fat and protein needed by many winter birds.
5. Hummingbird feeders – specialty summer feeders provide nectar for hummingbirds.
6. Oriole feeders – specialty summer feeders that provide fruit and grape jelly for orioles



Types of feed:

1. Sunflower – used by the most birds and should definitely be included in any winter bird feeding set-up. Striped is OK, but **black oil sunflower** seed is best by far.
2. Mixed seed – often contains **sunflower seed, millet, safflower, cracked corn**, and may contain peanuts, etc. Good all-around seed to use, since it contains the variety needed by the most birds, but important to use a good quality!
3. **Niger thistle** seed – a fine seed requiring specialized feeders. It is preferred by finches, and necessary if you want to attract goldfinches and house finches.
4. **Cracked corn** – eaten by a variety of birds, including pheasants and waterfowl.
5. **Safflower seed** – often used in mixed seed, but can be used by itself or mixed with millet for use in ground feeders. Squirrels mostly avoid safflower seed.
6. **Suet** – can be used alone or mixed with other seed. Should not be used during warm weather as it can become rancid.
7. **Orange slices/grape jelly** – used in summer for orioles, but may attract insects as well.
8. **Nectar/sugar water** – used for hummingbirds (easy to make and does NOT need red dye).

Choosing locations for feeders:

1. Follow 6-foot rule for hanging feeders! No trees, bushes or limbs 5-6 feet above, below or around the feeders – this will prevent squirrels from easily getting to feeder.
2. Feeders should be in open areas, but protected somewhat from winter winds.
3. Birds need to be able to see any potential predators
 - a. Sheltering trees and shrubs should be no closer than 10-15 feet.
 - b. If positioned under mature trees, make sure that lower branches are removed.
 - c. Ground vegetation should be mowed or no taller than 1 foot.
4. Don't forget YOU! Set up your feeders in a location where you can watch the birds from indoors.

Tips when starting out:

1. Put out a good quality mixed seed to see what birds will show up in your neighborhood.
2. Do not put out large quantities but just enough to last a day or two.
3. Offer seed in various locations – hanging feeder, platform feeder, scattered on ground, AND do this in various places in your yard if possible (or switch locations after a few weeks) to see which locations the birds prefer.
4. Be patient! It may take birds a few weeks to discover your offerings.
5. Once you've found a set-up that is attracting birds, you should continue for the remainder of the feeding season.

Dealing with Squirrels:

1. Squirrels have proved themselves to be more than a match for our best efforts at keeping them out of bird feeders. Here's some tips to follow:
2. Feeders should be positioned 5-6 feet off ground and at least this far from the nearest tree or branch.
3. Hang all feeders from a wire cable or mount them on top of a narrow-gauge metal post or shepherd's hook.
4. Equip all hanging feeders with baffles – above for hanging feeders and below for post-mounted feeders.
5. Tube feeders with multiple perches are the best bets.
6. Bend a little and supply the squirrels with cracked corn on the ground, and they may leave your sunflower seed alone.

Feeder Maintenance:

1. ALWAYS take apart and thoroughly wash feeders at the start of the season (helps prevent disease spread among the birds).
2. Check feed in feeders during wet weather to ensure seed has remained dry. If seed becomes wet, throw out, clean feeder, and refill with dry seed.
3. Keep all bird seed stored in rodent-proof containers to maintain freshness and prevent infestation by insects. Suet blocks need to be stored in refrigerator or freezer. Hummingbird nectar needs to be refrigerated.
4. During summer, nectar and fruit feeders need to be replenished daily, especially in hot weather, as these foods ferment quickly.