



# NORTHERN

# Gardener

CREATING & CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT



## Feeding Wild Birds

### CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ Feeding wild birds is an easy way for humans to give back to nature. Birds return the favor with color, song and activity.
- ✓ Birds help to reduce insect populations.
- ✓ Bird-attracting plants will also add beauty to your yard.

Providing for and feeding wild birds can be a very rewarding and enjoyable activity. Bird feeding is the most popular form of providing for wildlife and is practiced by more than one-half of all homeowners. Other means of providing for birds include installing bird houses, providing fresh water and the planting of trees, shrubs, evergreens and flowers to provide shelter and natural food. Birds, as well as other wildlife, can bring an added dimension to the landscape with their color, song and activity.

1. When starting to feed birds, black-oil type sunflower seed or a mixture containing a good percentage of sunflower and/or safflower seeds is good to use. The protein, carbohydrates, fats and oils provided by seeds are needed by birds, especially in winter, to keep warm. For some birds, suet can also provide for some of these needs. When starting with sunflower seed, additional types of seed may be added as you learn which birds feed at your station. See the accompanying chart for additional information.



2. Position the feeder out of the wind

and near trees and shrubs. A ten-foot distance from overhanging trees or buildings is recommended to discourage squirrels. When possible, choose plants in the landscape that provide seed, nectar, or cover for birds. Mass plantings, thickets and dense growth are desirable for bird habitat.

3. After setting up the feeder, it is important to provide an uninterrupted daily supply of food. The birds depend on it. Also, inspect the feeder weekly for cleanliness.

4. Birds need grit to digest their food and, in winter, birds have difficulty finding enough of it. Grit is small hard objects the bird take in to help them grind up their

food . . . small pebbles, eggshells, and coarse sand can all serve this purpose. Add an extra fine grit to the feeder in the winter, when snow covers their natural sources of grit.

5. You may want to add more feeders to attract more birds. Space these feeders to accommodate the various flight paths of the birds. Consider adding a thistle feeder, a window feeder or an additional basic feeder.



6. If squirrels can become or are a problem, then consider using a squirrel resistant feeder or ask us for the current information on making feeders that are more squirrel resistant. Another alternative is to provide squirrels with a feeding area on the ground and away from the bird-feeding station.

7. Take down your hummingbird and oriole feeders by September 15. This encourages the birds to migrate, which is essential for their survival, since they cannot tolerate our cold winters.

8. Providing a source of water will attract the largest number of species. Birds will be best attracted to a source of dripping water. Birds need water in the winter for bathing (to keep clean and warm) and to drink. Specially designed birdbath heaters are available to keep the bath free of ice.

## Birds Frequently Seen at Feeders

**YEAR ROUND RESIDENTS:** Nut hatches, Chickadees, Blue Jays, Red Bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, Cardinals and Gold Finches.



## NOMADIC WINTER

**RESIDENTS:** Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Red Polls.

## SUMMER ONLY RESIDENTS:

Mourning Doves, humming birds.

## Planting for Wild Birds

Almost all plants provide some cover and food for birds throughout the year. Some of the best at providing food and cover and also adding color to the landscape are:

**SUMMER:** Serviceberry (Amelanchier), Plum, Cherry, Chokecherry, Raspberry, Elderberry, Blueberry and Grape, Strawberry.

**FALL:** Dogwood, Green Ash, Winterberry, Crabapple, Buffaloberry, Mountain-Ash, Viburnum.

**WINTER:** Bittersweet, Hawthorn, Crabapple, Sumac, Viburnum, Snowberry, Shrub Rose, Black Chokeberry, Russian Olive, Hackberry, Oak.

**NECTAR:** Salvia, Monarda, Columbine, Petunia (single fl.), Hollyhock (single fl.), Trumpet Vine, Hosta, Red Weigela.

**SEED SOURCE:** Zinnia, Sunflower, Cleome, Petunia.



BIRD	FEEDER TYPE	PREFERRED FOOD
Woodpeckers	Hanging and tree-trunk suet feeders	Suet, Hulled Sunflower, Cracked Corn
Chickadees	All types	Hulled Sunflower, Sunflower, Suet Safflower
Cardinal	All wooden feeders Platform feeders Tube feeders with tray (prefers shelf over a perch)	Sunflower, Cracked Corn Safflower
Gold Finches and Purple Finches	Tube thistle feeders All other seed feeders	Black (oil) Sunflower, Hulled Sunflower, Safflower, Niger Thistle
Pine Siskin	Tube thistle feeders All other seed feeders	Black (oil) Sunflower, Hulled Sunflower, Niger Thistle, Suet
Red Polls	Tube thistle feeders All other seed feeders	Hulled Sunflower Niger Thistle
Blue Jay	All feeders	Sunflower, Suet Peanuts, Whole Corn
Nuthatch	All feeders	Suet, Black (oil) Sunflowers, Stripe Sunflower, Peanuts
Pheasants	Feed on the ground	Corn - Whole, Cracked or on the Cob
Hummingbirds & Orioles	Hummingbird/Oriole Feeding Stations	Nectar, Grape Jelly Oranges
Mourning Doves	Feed on the ground	Safflower, Black (oil) Sunflower, Corn, Wheat

### Learn more about Birds and Birdfeeding with the following books:

*Landscaping for Wildlife* - Carroll Henderson, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources;  
*Woody Plants that Attract Birds* - University of Minnesota; *Birds of North America* - Roffins, Bruun, Zim, and Singer-Golden Press, New York; *Eastern Birds* - Roger Troy Peterson;  
*Complete Guide to Bird Feeding* - John V. Dennis-Knopf.



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