

EARNING THEIR WINGS

Using feeders and food to attract birds to your garden

As you know, there's nothing that makes a garden more friendly and welcoming than the sounds of birds in the trees. To encourage them to accept your invitation year round, we'll explain the various types of feeders and seed.

What is a tube feeder?

- Tube feeders are popular with gardeners because they're easy to hang and fill.
- Birds like them because they're easy to eat from.
- These types of feeders are available in a wide range of prices and qualities. Better ones have metal feeding ports to prevent squirrel damage.
- Tube feeders are available in various sizes and for various types of seed, from large sunflowers to tiny Nyjer (often mistakenly called thistle).
- Most types of birds, including chickadees, nuthatches, goldfinches, house finches, downy woodpeckers and cardinals, will feed from tube feeders.

What is a hopper feeder?

- It's a classic box-shaped feeder.
- Hopper feeders can be mounted on a pole or hung from a wire or chain.
- It can be more difficult to keep the hopper-style feeder free from squirrels.
- Hopper feeders work well for most small birds, as well as for attracting larger birds, such as woodpeckers, blue jays and grosbeaks.

What is a platform feeder?

- These are also known as tray feeders.
- They're designed for ground-feeding birds, such as juncos, sparrows, doves, grouse and pheasants—birds that don't like to perch on tubes or hoppers.
- *A drawback:* Seed isn't protected from weather or other animals, so platform feeders require more regular filling and maintenance.

What is a bowl feeder?

- Bowl feeders are used for feeding bread and fruit, along with other scraps, peanuts and large seeds.
- They attract bluebirds, robins and orioles, which enjoy bread, jelly or scraps of fruit.

What is a suet feeder?

- Suet feeders are sources of fat for insect-eating birds, such as woodpeckers, nuthatches and mockingbirds.
- You'll find them typically as a wire or mesh cage.



What are thistle socks?

- Thistle socks are made of nylon mesh, from which birds cling as tiny Nyjer seeds slip through.
- They're a favorite feeder for goldfinches and chickadees.

What is a nectar feeder?

- Nectar feeders have narrow tubes through which birds with long, narrow beaks drink sugar water.
- They mimic trumpet-shaped flowers, such as honeysuckle.
- Such feeders primarily attract hummingbirds and orioles.
- Orioles are attracted to orange feeders, while hummingbirds are lured by red feeders.

Other options:

- *Window feeders:* platform feeders that mount with suction cups to windows for close-up viewing.
- *Pinecones:* Coat them with peanut butter, which is a fun project for kids; just attach pipe cleaner, spread with peanut butter, roll in seeds and hang for the birds.

Seed options:

What type of seed attracts what type of bird?

Sunflowers

- There are several types available, including black oil, striped and hulled.
- Black oil seeds are the most popular of all birdseeds.
- Striped seeds are what humans eat; they have a thicker shell than black oil sunflowers.
- Most birds will eat them.
- Hulled sunflowers are more expensive, but they'll attract birds whose beaks aren't strong enough to crack open a sunflower hull.
- Birds that like sunflower include cardinals, nuthatches, chickadees, finches, grosbeaks, flickers, jays, titmice and doves.

Nyjer

- Nyjer is the name trademarked by the Wild Bird Feeding Industry for the tiny black imported birdseed loved by finches.
- It's 40% oil, which is an essential source of energy for the birds that eat it.
- Birds that like Nyjer: goldfinches, purple finches, house finches, pine siskins, doves, juncos and sparrows. (Continued on back of page)

FAQs

Q. Aside from feeding birds for our benefit, is it necessary to feed them?

A. Birds can care for themselves, but because we have encroached on their habitats, there often aren't as many sources of food in the wild for which to forage. Also, those sources tend to become scarcer near the end of winter.

Q. Can birds become dependent on feeders?

A. Birds may become accustomed to finding food in your yard, but they forage for food in numerous places, so if your feeder is empty, they'll look elsewhere. However, during extreme winter weather, birds may have a difficult time finding natural food sources, so your feeder can be important to their survival.

Q. How can I attract small birds without attracting large flocks of annoying birds, such as pigeons and grackles?

A. Use small tube feeders that are difficult for large birds to feed from. Don't use platform feeders, and don't spread food on the ground. Avoid food such as peanuts, cracked corn and sunflowers that attract larger birds. Stick with Nyjer and hulled sunflowers.

Q. How do I keep squirrels out of my birdfeeders?

A. Try hanging feeders from monofilament fishing line. Hang them as far from trees as possible, so squirrels can't leap to the feeder. You might also provide a separate feeding area for squirrels.

Q. Where should I put my birdfeeder?

A. Birds like protection from predators, so your feeders should be relatively close to trees and shrubbery, where they can hide and nest.



White proso millet, red proso millet

- These are the tiny seeds often found in birdseed mixes, but they're also available alone.
- White millet is most often found in mixes sold in the East, while red millet is most often found in the West.
- Both types are tasty to birds, especially ground feeders, so it's good to use on platform feeders.
- Birds that like millet: doves, juncos, sparrows towhees, quail, bobwhite, cardinals, finches, buntings, thrashers, jays, tanagers and pheasants.

Safflower

- High in fat, oil and protein, safflower seeds are a favorite of numerous wild birds.
- It's especially attractive to cardinals.
- It's an expensive seed, so it's most often found in high-end mixes.
- A benefit of safflower is that some "feeder hogs," such as starlings and grackles, don't like safflower's bitter taste.

- Squirrels don't like them as much as other seeds, either.
- Birds that like safflower: cardinals, chickadees, grosbeaks, titmice and nuthatches.

Cracked corn

- Cracked corn is a good source of protein and fiber for birds.
- It's often used on platform feeders.
- It's also enjoyed by other wildlife, such as squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons and deer.
- Birds that like cracked corn: doves, quail, sparrows, starlings, blackbirds, cowbirds, blue jays and grackles.

Peanuts

- Peanuts are a favorite treat of many birds, especially jays.
- Even tiny birds will hunt for small peanuts they can fly away with.
- Use a platform feeder or special peanut feeder.
- Birds that like peanuts: woodpeckers, blue jays, crows, titmice, chickadees and nuthatches

Suet

- Suet is rendered beef fat that provides the type of nutrition birds get from eating insects.
- It's most often put out for birds when the weather turns cold, and insects are more difficult to find.
- In cold weather, the suet won't turn rancid as it will when it's warmer than 70F.
- Birds that like suet: nuthatches, woodpeckers, wrens, warblers, mockingbirds and blue jays.

Seed mixes

- A seed mix is a convenient way to put out a buffet for everyone.
- Tubes and hoppers are the easiest feeders to use for seed mixes.

Finally, don't forget a good source of water, which will attract birds, as well. It can be a fancy birdbath or a plastic plant saucer. In winter, a small inexpensive birdbath heater will keep ice from forming.

Materials. Remember to provide examples of the feeders and seed mentioned, as well as a simple birdbath and warmer.

Online Resources

<http://my.pclink.com/~rlovgren/feeding.htm>

(Excellent feeding chart for specific birds)

www.birdwatchersdigest.com

(The Web site for the magazine *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Check out their "Backyard Booklet" series)

www.birdfeeding.org

(A wealth of information on feeding birds, supported by retailer Wild Bird Centers of America. There's an excellent section of FAQs on feeding specific birds.)

www.ebirdseed.com

(An online source of a wide range of feeders and seed, with detailed descriptions of each.)

<http://birds.cornell.edu/>

(Web site of Cornell University's lab of ornithology. This is an excellent resource for all things birding, including Cornell's Project Feederwatch). 🍃

—Chris Beytes