

FEED THE BIRDS

Not only does it positively impact the health of birds around you, it's winter fun for all ages.

What could be more relaxing than enjoying a cup of coffee at the kitchen table while watching birds jockey for spots at the feeder on your porch?

As temperatures drop, our winged friends who didn't make the trip south for the season certainly appreciate filled bird feeders as a welcome break from foraging. The seed you provide helps birds stay energized and warm through the cold and helps them start the spring off healthy.

Here's some basic information about the different types of seed, feeders and houses available. It's important to have a basic understanding so you can choose the correct feeder style and mix of seed for the birds in your area. This information is general and it's always best to talk to the staff at your local garden center before purchasing seed, houses and feeders.

Of course, bird feeders will not only attract flying creatures. Squirrels will eat anything they can get their hands on when it comes to birdseed (except maybe safflower) so it's important to plan for those pesky guys before installing a feeder. Try to keep feeders away from trees and fences where squirrels hang out and definitely position some type of squirrel baffle to inhibit intruders. There are plenty of "squirrel-proof" feeders on the market and most are quite effective. But when it comes to squirrels nothing is fool-proof, so it's best to consider the little thieves ahead of time.

Seed Selection

Black Oil Sunflower. This is by far the most popular seed type. It's a small, black sunflower seed with a high fat content and a thin shell that's easy for the birds to open. You can usually buy it in a

variety of size bags by itself or in most mixes. It's best offered in hanging tube feeders and hopper feeders. It attracts many species of birds including chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, cardinals, and blue jays.

Striped Sunflower. This is a larger type of sunflower with a lower fat content and harder shell. It's black with white longitudinal stripes and it's harder for birds to open. Like black oil, it's best offered in hanging tube feeders and hoppers and attracts virtually the same birds.

Hulled Sunflower Seed. This is just sunflower seeds with no hulls. It comes as either complete hulled seeds or as sunflower chips. It's cleaner for you and easier for the birds to eat. It's best dispensed in a tube feeder or hopper and attracts the same birds as sunflower seeds in shells. Hulled sunflower also attracts birds like woodpeckers, mockingbirds and wrens, which can't crack sunflower seed shells.

Safflower. This is a large seed with a white coating. It is often used as a substitute for black oil sunflower in cases where people are trying to discourage grackles, starlings and house sparrows. Some people also claim most squirrels will not eat safflower—it's worth a shot. Offer it like sunflower to attract many of the same birds.

Millet. Millet is a small, round seed about the size of the head of a pin. Millet is often a major component of seed mixes. Millet can be placed in a variety of feeders, such as hanging tube feeders, hoppers, and tray feeders. It can also be just sprinkled on the ground. Millet is enjoyed by doves, sparrows and juncos, cardinals, bobwhites, quail and buntings.

Thistle Seed. This is a very tiny black seed. It does not come from our native thistle plants but is imported and will not germinate in your garden. It's sometimes referred to as "Nyjer" seed. Thistle seed is so tiny it must be offered in special feeders (with small seed portals) so it doesn't all spill out. This is one of the favorite seeds of goldfinches, as well as house finches, purple finches, pine siskins and redpolls.

Nuts. Increasingly more nuts are being offered in seed mixes. These include mostly peanuts and peanut hearts, a little central portion of the peanut. They're usually in seed mixes, but sometimes sold separately for use in hopper feeders, tray and scattered on the ground. Most birds that eat hulled sunflower seeds eat nuts. These include woodpeckers and mockingbirds along with chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, goldfinches, house finches, cardinals, grosbeaks and jays.

Setting the Table

There are three traditional feeder styles: tube, hopper and tray,



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made class on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.

Wild Bird Feeding Chart

Favorite = ●●

	Black Oil Sunflower	Striped Sunflower	Sunflower Chips	Safflower	Thistle	Cracked Corn	Peanuts	White Millet	Orange Halves	Raisins	Grapes	Suet
Baltimore Oriole									●			●
Blue Jay	●	●●		●		●	●●					●
Cardinal	●●	●	●	●		●		●				
Chickadees	●●	●	●	●			●					●●
Eastern Bluebird						●				●	●	●
Evening Grosbeak	●●	●										
Goldfinch	●		●		●●							
Hairy & Downy Woodpecker	●						●					●●
House Finch	●●	●		●	●						●	
Junco	●				●	●		●●				●
Mockingbird									●	●	●	●
Mourning Dove	●		●	●	●	●		●●				
Pine Siskin	●		●●		●●			●				●
Purple Finch	●●	●			●							
Red-bellied Woodpecker	●	●●		●		●	●		●			●●
Red-winged Blackbird	●		●			●		●				●
Robin											●	●
Rufouse-sided Towhee	●	●	●		●	●		●				
Song Sparrow	●				●			●●				
Tufted Titmouse	●	●●		●			●●					●
White-breasted Nuthatch	●●	●		●			●					●●

with many other specialty types available. Here's a quick overview to help you get started.

Tube Feeders. For beginners and hobby birders, tube style feeders are the best choice. To protect your feeder, select a model with metal ports around the seed dispensers to shield the feeder from squirrels and house sparrows. Hang the feeder at least five feet off the ground and position it near a window, where you can enjoy your new guests. Tube feeders are especially attractive to small birds such as chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, goldfinches, purple and house finches and siskins.

Hopper Feeders. Hopper feeders provide dry storage for several pounds of mixed seed, which flows from the feeder as birds eat. Best results have been achieved by mounting hopper feeders on a pole about five feet off the ground. These feeders attract all of the same species as tube feeders, as well as such larger birds as jays, red-winged blackbirds and cardinals. Be sure to choose a feeder with a substantial feeding platform, allowing larger birds to eat comfortably.

Tray Feeders. Simply a screen-bottomed tray, this feeder style sits several inches off the ground and is a particular favorite of doves, juncos, sparrows, towhees, goldfinches and cardinals. Some designs have covers to prevent snow from accumulating over the seed and others are surrounded by wire mesh to keep out squir-

rels and large birds such as crows and grackles. Place the feeder in an open location, at least 10 feet from the nearest shrub, to give birds a chance to flee in the event of a cat attack.

Others. Suet feeders are great all year but especially in winter. Check out the selection at your local garden center for one that will hold up to a squirrel attack because you know they'll be coming. It's almost as much fun to watch squirrels try to outwit a feeder or baffle system as it is to watch the birds.

Thistle feeders are also popular for attracting goldfinches. Most look like traditional tube feeders but with little tear-drop holes, although thistle feeders can also be wood with a fine mesh screen. Look for upside-down style thistle feeders to attract only goldfinches, which feed hanging upside down.

Stick with it

Remember birding can be a lot of fun when you stick with it and start to learn more about their societies and how they interact. For kids, their first bird feeder might be the start of a lifelong hobby and for adults, birding represents a relaxing, back-to-nature time each day to escape from stress. But once you start, keep at it. Birds quickly become acclimated to new feeders and will come back year after year expecting your generosity. Now let's get birding! 🍃

By Bill Calkins with thanks to the National Audubon Society, www.audubon.org.