

The

EVERYTHING

**YOU WANT TO KNOW
about**



BIRD FEEDERS

guide

The
«EVERYTHING YOU
WANT TO KNOW
ABOUT BIRD FEEDERS»
Guide





Table of Contents

- INTRODUCTION7
 - What will you get out of this book?.....8
- BIRD FEEDERS – WHAT THEY ARE9
- THE REASONING BEHIND BIRD FEEDERS11
- HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT BIRD FEEDER13
 - What types of birds do you want to attract to your garden13
 - How durable is your bird feeder14
 - Is maintenance easy15
 - How much seed will the feeder hold15
 - Do you live in the colder climes or the more warmer ones16
 - Are you on the migrating paths16
 - Do you want to squirrel and raccoon proof your feeder17
 - Money: how much are you willing to part with17
- WHERE CAN YOU BUY YOUR BIRD FEEDER?18
 - The Internet18
 - The Pet Store18
 - A Specialty Store18
 - A Garden Shop19
 - Department Stores: Garden Section19
 - The Hardware Shop19
- HOW LONG SHOULD YOUR BIRD FEEDER LAST20
- WHY HAVE A BIRD FEEDER22
- MAINTENANCE23
 - For Normal Bird Feeders23
 - For Hummingbird Feeders or Oriole Feeders23
 - The Area around your Bird Feeder24
 - Water Troughs and Bird Baths24
- SEASONAL OR ANNUAL25
- TYPES OF DIFFERENT FEEDERS26
 - Platform feeder26
 - Hopper27
 - Seed Tube feeder.....28
 - Thistle or Nyjer feeder.....29
 - Nectar Tube feeder30
 - Hummingbird feeder31
 - Oriole feeder32





Suet feeder	33
Window bird feeder	34
Ground feeder	36
Squirrel proof feeders	38
Counterbalance	38
Domed Cover	39
Extended Feeding Port	39
Electric Rotator	39
Caged Bird Feeder	39
Cover for your Pole	39
Additionally... ..	39
Metal feeders	40
Wooden feeders	40
Copper feeders	40
Which feeders for which birds	40
Hopper Feeder	40
Platform Feeder	41
Seed Tube Feeder	41
Seed Tube Feeder with platform	41
Nectar Tube Feeder	41
Suet Feeder	41
Ground Feeder	41
Nyjer Feeder	41
WHERE TO PLACE YOUR BIRD FEEDER	42
WHAT TO USE AS BIRD FOOD	43
Your basic bird food menus	43
Bird seed mixes	43
Seeds	44
Suet	44
Fruits	44
Nectar	45
Mealworms	45
Grit	46
Water	46
What not to feed birds	47
Chocolates	47
Old seeds or mixes	47
Desiccated coconut	47
Seeds with pesticides	47
Nectar with colored dyes	47
Which seeds for which birds	48
Sunflower	48





- Black Oil Sunflower Seeds 48
- Safflower 48
- Corn 48
- Millet 49
- Nyjer 49
- Peanuts 49
- Milo 49
- Seeds 49
 - Sunflower 50
 - Black Oil Sunflower 50
 - Safflower 51
 - Corn 51
 - Millet 51
 - Proso Millet 52
 - Nyjer 52
 - Peanuts 53
 - Milo 54
- WATER 55
- GET YOUR KIDS INVOLVED 57
 - Building your own birdfeeder 58
 - Platform Feeders 58
 - Finch Feeder 58
 - Sunflower Seed Feeder 58
 - Pine Cone Suet Feeder 59
 - Easy Suet Feeder 59
 - Oriole Orange Feeder 59
 - Oriole Nectar Feeder 59
 - Milk Carton Feeder 59
 - Coconut Feeder 60
 - Easy Orange Feeder 60
 - Hummingbird Feeder 60
 - Coffee Can Feeder 60
 - Suet Log Feeder 61
 - Simple Ground Feeder 61
 - Bird feed recipes 61
 - Bread Suet recipe 61
 - Suet Balls 62
 - Bird Cake 62
 - Hummingbird Nectar 62
 - Rice Recipe 62
 - Fruit Cocktail 62
 - Fruit Suet 63





Rendered Fat Cakes	63
Lard and Peanut Butter Suet	63
Oriole Ambrosia	63
Bird Feeder Shish Kebabs	64
Identifying birds	64
Binoculars	65
ATTRACTING BIRDS	66
Check List	66
What You Can Do	66
Food	66
Water	67
Plant Cover	67
Housing Accommodation	68
Cats	68
Most common garden birds	68
DISCOURAGING LARGE BIRDS	70
BAFFLES	72
So, what can you do?	73
BIRD FEEDING CONTROVERSIES	75
PRECAUTIONS	77
Bird diseases	77
What to do to prevent bird diseases	77
Keep alternate or extra feeding stations	78
Signs to look for, warning you of possible bird disease	78
Known common bird ailments	78
Window collisions	79
How to prevent collisions	80
What to do if you find a stunned bird	81
Cats	81
BIRD FLU	84
MAKING YOUR GARDEN BIRD FRIENDLY	85
Food	86
Cover	87
Nesting sites	87
Bird Houses	87
Dead trees /Logs	88
Bird Baths	88
Trees and other shrubs	88
A few trees that birds favor	88
A few shrub varieties for your birds	89
Flowering Nectar plants	89
A SMALL NOTE	90





Introduction

According to my cute-as-a-button five year old niece, a bird feeder is not that collection of wood, wire, and plastic that I have sitting so proudly in my backyard. It is in fact, as she so proudly and logically informed me, herself. Now, I know that might sound confusing to everyone out there who thought that their bird feeders were inanimate objects acting as receptacles for any food that you might put in it. But you'll be glad to know that in my case at least – and yours too, according to my niece – it's the person who goes out there and *puts* the food in the bird feeder who is the actual bird feeder, not the feeder itself.

Hopefully that wasn't too confusing, but just to be sure let me clarify the point and tell you verbatim what my niece said.

"No, no, no. That's not the bird feeder, silly. *I'm* the bird feeder." At this point she looks up at me with her big eyes and her lower lip sticking out and asks me, "Don't I feed the birds good then?"

Naturally I start to feel like a heel and rush in to tell her that she "feeds the birds good" and that yes she's the bird feeder and not that pile of cedar or glass and copper that's standing so proudly in front of my living room windows.

Besides, who can contradict such an abundantly clear cut piece of five year old logic? From her point of view she really is the bird feeder, so who am I to go against it.

Having now satisfactorily disposed of that little piece of nonsense out of the way (I read the whole thing back to my niece who was tickled pink at having been mentioned in this book) we can hopefully now move on to matters of great import that concern all bird lovers, namely that of bird feeders.

I know that the topic of bird feeders is an odd choice of book to write about, but to me it encompasses the best of both worlds. Not only do I get to write about my favorite subject (birds, just in case you didn't guess), but I also get to tell it to a bunch of enthusiastic birders who understand the absolute necessity of having their own bird feeder in their backyard.

If you're reading this introduction and are wondering just what I'm talking about or think that I'm just plain off my rocker, two reasons could account for this. You're getting this book for someone else who's a bird enthusiast and just wanted to see whether it's worth your while giving it to them; or you've only just started on your life of birding and haven't as yet become as far-gone as I have in my birding pursuits. If it's the former case then let me





assure you now that it's highly worth your while giving this book to your favorite birder; and if it's the latter case then rest assured that before very long you will understand what I'm talking about.

As an ardent birding enthusiast I have sometimes been accused of speaking a different language by my family. So be warned fair bird reader, though I might sometimes lapse into this strange and wonderful language at times, I will always do my utmost best to explain such terms to you.

In fact I'll start right now and tell you that when I say,

- birder – I mean a person who's enthusiastic about birds and particular bird related pursuits
- birding – means the actual pursuit of all things birds
- hummer – is an affectionate shortened term for the tiny little hummingbirds
- bird feeder – I use this term interchangeably throughout the book and it's mainly case-specific, so although most times I will be referring to the actual bird feeding stations, there are times when I'll take a leaf out of my niece's book and be referring instead to you.

Hopefully that will avoid some confusion as you read along.

What will you get out of this book?

Why are you reading this book and what's the aim of it? Is it merely a frivolous book written on the aspects of bird feeding, or is does it hold any information that's of any use. Only you can decide whether it's of any use to you, but my intention was to help try and demystify the odd world known to all birders as bird feeding.

To that end I've sectioned this book off into what I hope are logical sequences, but which will all ultimately tie in together anyway. You might find that parts are repeated here and there where it was absolutely unavoidable for me to keep it out. As you go along you'll find that almost everything in birding is interrelated and you just can't go into one subject without encroaching on another. In these cases I've not rehashed the same information, but have instead referred you back to the original section where there's more detail.

So what can you get out of this book (besides odd insights into my crazy world)? Basically, almost anything and everything that you'll ever want to know about birding. Naturally there'll be some things that aren't covered here but for the most part you should find what you need to start you off on a jaunt into the world of bird feeding.





Bird Feeders – What they are

If you have a rough idea of what a bird feeder is (besides my niece that is), then you're probably on the right track. A bird feeder is simply something upon which you can place food for birds to enjoy. The variety in bird feeding comes from the different types of bird feeders that are available. They can range from simple do-it-yourself bird feeding platforms to state of the art bird feeders with devices and accessories that outshine the birds themselves.

For detailed descriptions on some of the different types of feeders available, you can skip ahead to the section entitled "Types of Different Bird Feeders". For a description on how to build your own bird feeder go to the section called "Building your own bird feeder".

Basically though if you've just started this bird feeding lark (excuse the pun) you can start out in a simple manner and progress from there. Of course you always have the option of plunging into the deep end of the pool and that's alright as well, every journey starts with the first step and it's really up to you what your first step is going to be. For myself I started at quite an early age at my grandparents' farm where I built my first bird feeder by myself – a cleaned out old paint-can lid nailed firmly to a convenient fence post!

At that age, the highlight for me was to actually go out and put the food on the plate and watch for the cardinals to come and eat. If I was really lucky I got to see a woodpecker or two along with a few juncos and chickadees. It was from this rather simple bird feeder that I graduated to a slightly more sophisticated one in my parents' backyard. This time I had a piece of wood for a platform and a pole on which to place it.

Although this was still quite rudimentary it did the job and I'm convinced that this was the starting point for my addiction to bird watching and all things birds. From there I progressed to begging my parents for a pair of binoculars and saving up enough pocket money to buy the scraps and things necessary to build myself a "better" bird feeder.

Naturally with such enthusiasm there was always more than one bird feeder around and at times our backyard was inundated more by my dubious building efforts than by actual birds. I never gave up however and through many a trial and error (along with quite a few trips to my local library to gather more information) I found out what worked best.

For instance I found that hummingbirds needed nectar and appropriate feeders, that woodpeckers liked peanuts and suet, and that northern cardinals like feeding close to the ground. Most other birds, I found out,





liked the platform method as did any and every squirrel that it was my luck to confront.

I also found out that if I didn't place my feeders in the right place, the neighbor's cat, along with the squirrels, would have easy access to them. With the squirrels this was more of a food problem where they would generally hoard away all my bird seed. And although the same applied to the cat in that it was a food problem, this problem involved a diminishing of the bird population as opposed to a diminishing of my supply of bird seed!

So I learnt quickly and speedily and went on to become a firm birder which is where we find ourselves now as I try to explain to you exactly what a bird feeder is.

From my earlier rambling discourse better known as the "Introduction", you've probably got a general idea of what a bird feeder entails but let me try and go into a little more detail if I can, without crossing too much into the same information I've given you in the following sections.

You know, or you're vaguely aware, that a bird feeder is a feeding device or station, and that it's also generally found outdoors most often in your backyard. It can be anything from a fancy bird sized mansion to an earthier wooden feeder that blends in well with your garden or it could even be as simple as placing an old baking sheet in your yard and filling it with seed or any other kind of bird food. There's really no easier and simple way of saying it though, than to tell you that a bird feeder is anything which holds food for birds and from which they will come and feed. Everything else that follows is just for aesthetics or for the pure fun of it.

Since most people have a bird feeder for the pure pleasure of watching and enjoying the many birds that will flock to their gardens it's safe to assume that the feeder will be placed in a prominent position. Most often this will be in direct line-of-sight to a place where you can enjoy the antics of the feathered variety from a safe and comfortable distance.

For correct placing information of your feeder, I've gone into more detail in the section "Where to place your bird feeder". For now suffice it to say that there's more to bird feeding than meets the eye so read on and find out for yourself.





The reasoning behind bird feeders

The beginning title may or may not have made sense to you, but here's the long and short of what I was trying to convey to you in a one-lined sentence: what's the cause, the driving force, behind having a bird feeder and why are they built in certain ways.

If you're new to this whole bird feeding thing then you're probably wondering what all the fuss is about right? If you want to feed the birds in your area then the easiest and simplest method is to do what I did in the beginning of my birding career and place a flat platform type of thing somewhere within easy arm's reach where you can sit and watch the birds flock to your offerings, right? Not necessarily, there's more detail that needs to be filled in to get a complete picture.

All of the many elaborate types of bird feeders that you can find are intended to fill a gaping void that looms out at you if you want to attract more than one or two types of birds to your garden. And if you're doing the whole bird feeding through the kindness of your heart then you'll definitely want to be providing for all of the different types of birds during the cold winter months. This includes all the birds who don't migrate for the winter and who need nourishment as well.

Then there's always the necessity to keep out unwanted intruders from your bird feeder stations. The last thing you'll want is to have a friendly chattering squirrel hoard away all your bird food so the actual birds don't get the food, or even an inquisitive raccoon raiding your feeding platforms.

And let's not forget the purely aesthetic reasons for having a bird feeder. A pleasant looking bird feeder – as opposed to a paint-can lid – is a sight for sore eyes, especially if it's covered with birds scrabbling for food. I can tell you now there's nothing quite like sitting on the porch swing with a long cold lemonade in your hands watching a host of birds flying to and fro in your garden. Don't get me wrong here, I wouldn't trade that first paint-can lid bird feeder for all the newer shinier feeders on the market, but sometimes it's just nice to sit back and enjoy the sight of that new shiny feeder in your garden.

Those are some of the main reasons behind the growing bird feeder industry and it's safe to say that many people probably appreciate their bird feeding efforts more because their feeder stations come equipped with all the latest toys like a squirrel or raccoon baffle. (I go into more detail on these in the section "Baffles".) But what about all the different designs that the feeders come in, not to mention the bewildering array of shapes and sizes? What do they mean and how does it all fit in?





To begin with perhaps I should tell you the reason that so many different types of feeders arose was from the picky feeding habits of the many birds. If you observe them closely for any length of time, you'll see that some birds will prefer to eat from ground level while some birds will like the height of a pole-mounted platform feeder, and some birds won't take anything other than nectar.

If you want to attract only one type of bird to your feeder then fine, you could go for the most basic feeders and be done with it. But there are some people like myself who absolutely must have different feeders to attract more birds to my garden and that's where the whole "different feeders" issue comes in. Different feeders equates to different birds coming to your garden. To get a better overview of the feeder types involved go to the section "Types of different feeders".

So now perhaps that peculiar looking tubular bird feeder, or perhaps even that wire meshed small box you saw at the store makes more sense when you think that they're all actually fitted to suit a different variety of birds.

To find out which bird feeder you'll need and which one's right for you, just go on to the next section "How to choose the right bird feeder". After that I'll go into more detail and will strive to explain what the different types of feeders are and what they can do for you.





How to choose the right bird feeder

How do you choose the right bird feeder for you? What's the first thing you need to do and is the choice of bird feeder truly an important one? Well, in the beginning probably not. The choice of your first bird feeder can be simple and rudimentary, you don't really need anything too fancy and something with a low price tag might suit you even better, at least until you make up your mind as to what you really want from your bird feeder.

If you've been birding for a while now however, you won't have too much trouble on deciding what type of bird feeder you'll need and you might even be able to teach me thing or two into the bargain. If you're new to this whole birding thing however, then you're probably wondering how on earth you can easily find the right bird feeding station to suit you.

A few factors come into the equation of choosing your first bird feeder and I'll go through them one by one to make your options clearer and easier for you to wade through.

If you don't want to go through all this hassle in the beginning though, or if you just want the pleasure of finding out your birding needs for yourself, then I suggest you go ahead and buy the basic platform bird feeder. It's always the best place to start and can give you a great boost on your learning curve. If you skip on ahead though, you'll find a few sections later on in this book that might interest you and help your feeding efforts as well.

However if you want to gather as much information as possible before making your choice on which feeder to buy, read on. I've mentioned first in point form the facts and essentials that you should consider, and go into detail afterward.

- What types of birds do you want to attract to your garden
- How durable is your bird feeder
- Is maintenance easy
- How much seed will the feeder hold
- Do you live in the colder climes or the more warmer ones
- Are you on the migrating paths
- Do you want to squirrel and raccoon proof your feeder
- Money: how much are you willing to part with

What types of birds do you want to attract to your garden

The first and most important question that you can ask of yourself when buying a feeder is what type of bird or birds do you want to attract to your





garden? This is most important as the choice of feeder is sometimes dictated by the type of bird.

For instance, if hummingbirds are what you want to attract to your garden then investing in a platform feeder won't get you anywhere. Hummingbirds need nectar and special hummingbird feeders are needed for them to feed from and the same applies to orioles. But if it's northern cardinals you want then you'll want to look into buying ground feeders; or maybe you'll want suet feeders for any woodpeckers and others of its ilk.

Hopefully you get the general idea, but if you're new to all of this you might even now be wondering how on earth you'll be able to know which birds can be found in your area. That too is a fairly simple problem to overcome and any field guide native to your area can help you or barring that I've always the internet to be a mine of information. Otherwise you could always find more information at your library or perhaps even from a bird society in your area.

Once you know all the pertinent details it's just a matter of narrowing it down to which particular birds you want to attract. After that you can again resort to any of these sources to get the low-down on which feeders the birds prefer or you could always ask a friendly sales person from your pet store.

Before you go rushing out however, consider the rest of the points first as these may also play a significant part in your choice.

How durable is your bird feeder

When you're choosing your bird feeder for the first time you might want to find out how durable your bird feeder is. Is it going to last for at least the length of one season or will it last for a year? Will it crumble to pieces the minute you turn your back on it, or will it stand the test of time.

I realize that most of these questions are generally unanswerable especially if you're doing this for the first time, but the quality that the feeders are constructed of can help you in your endeavors as well. More detail can be found on this subject in the section called "How long should your bird feeder last".

Regular maintenance of the feeder also goes a long way in the prolonging of the lifetime of your feeder and is covered in the section "Maintenance". With regular maintenance you'll find that your bird feeder will stay almost like new through the years, with only the normal wear-and-tear of daily life affecting it overly.





Is maintenance easy

Another deciding factor in choosing your bird feeder should be whether the maintenance of your feeder is going to be easy or difficult. Naturally this also depends on what type of feeder you're going in for, but with only a few exceptions most bird feeders should be easy to clean and hassle free.

While most feeders will only need to be cleaned at least once or twice a month, specialty feeders like hummingbird or nectar feeders will need to be cleaned at least once a week to promote good hygienic conditions.

For proper maintenance information, look up the section "Maintenance". If cleaning your bird feeder isn't going to be easy, then I'd suggest you try switching your feeder type to something different, or try different brands of the same feeder. Remember, not all feeders were made equal.

How much seed will the feeder hold

The answer to this question is entirely dependant upon yourself. If, like me, you'd enjoy putting out the birdseed on an almost daily basis then I'd suggest going in for a feeder that won't hold a lot of seed, only enough to feed the birds for a day or two.

If, however, you don't want to be continually filling your bird feeder then I'd suggest looking at a feeder that can hold a large amount of seed in reserve. If you're going in for this type then additionally you'll need to make sure that your feeder is well protected from the elements as otherwise your seeds will become moldy and unpalatable to the birds.

For this type of feeder you might also want to look into purchasing a squirrel or raccoon baffle to go along with it. Long untended bird feeders are probably more enticing to squirrels who are indiscriminate and will eat from any and every source they can find, especially if there's no guard over it. So, although squirrels will raid the smaller bird feeders as well as the larger ones, having them hoard away your seed from the large capacity feeders sort of defeats the purpose - you got them in the first place so that you wouldn't need to continually be refilling the feeder.

You might have intended the seed in the feeder to last you for a long period of time but the squirrel couldn't care less about that. Investing in a squirrel baffle is good long term sense in this case then.

In the case of hummingbird feeders before buying your feeder you'll need to first scout out whether you might have a large population to feed or whether it's only one or two. Also hummingbirds are territorial especially during mating season, so you might also want to think about getting more





than one. Some hummers however aren't so fierce and you might get a few hummers coming to one feeder.

Large feeders to feed only one or two hummingbirds is not only wasteful it can also become dangerous if the nectar ferments. So in the beginning I'd perhaps suggest going in for a small two ounce feeder and seeing how many hummers actually come into yard. From there it's a simple matter of buying a bigger feeder if you have more hummers than your present feeder can handle.

Do you live in the colder climes or the more warmer ones

Once you've found out what type of birds you want to attract you'll next want to find out whether they'll be around throughout the year, or whether they're going to be migrating.

If you live in a warm climate there's a good chance that your choice of bird is assured to be found nearby throughout the year, but if you live in the more colder climes you might find that your preferred birds aren't to be found in the cold winter months. You might however want to feed the other birds that live in your area and who don't migrate whilst the others are gone.

Again, the same source that supplied you with information on the birds in your area can supply you with other such necessary information on finding the migrating patterns of birds, which brings us to our next point.

Are you on the migrating paths

If you're on the migrating paths of birds then you could well be rewarded lushly by an amazing number of different bird species. To take advantage of this fact you might want to shell out a little bit more cash and invest in more than one bird feeder, but I'd recommend first scoping out the situation for at least one year before you go all crazy and buy out the bird store.

If other birders in your area have the same idea you might not be able to attract too many birds to your garden since there's more than likely to be abundance of food readily available to these birds.

Having different types of feeding stations however, could attract quite a different variety of birds and checking out the migrating bird species for your area can help you in choosing your bird feeders.





Do you want to squirrel and raccoon proof your feeder

Another point to take into consideration is whether you want to squirrel proof your feeder. Remember that squirrels are notorious little thieves and will hoard any little bit of food you keep out.

I personally like the little pesky little critters and find a way to separate my squirrels from my birds, although that can be a difficult task at the best of times. This decision's entirely up to whether you have any tolerance whatsoever for squirrels or not.

If you do want to squirrel proof your feeder you'll be glad to find that there are many feeders that can provide you with this facility, and if you don't want to spend the extra cash on this then you always have the choice of fighting the squirrel battle on your own terms! Warning: this may cause you severe headaches and will take you countless hours to do, and in the end you might not win this particular battle after all.

Money: how much are you willing to part with

Despite of everything that you've decided upon to this point, sometimes the crunch comes here. Just as bird feeders come in different shapes, sizes and varieties so they also come in different money ranges.

So although you might have decided to get a state of the art platform bird feeder that will incorporate a squirrel baffle along with it, if the price is too high you might have to reevaluate your needs and go in for something a little less expensive.

Then again you also have the option of just building your own bird feeder from scratch. I've anticipated that problem as well and you should be able to find instructions for a rudimentary bird feeder in the section entitled "Building your own bird feeder".

Generally speaking though, you'll find that most feeders are priced reasonably and you shouldn't have too much trouble finding one to suit your requirements and your budget.





Where can you buy your Bird Feeder?

Now that you've decided to get yourself a bird feeder you're probably feeling a little anxious until you can actually go out and buy your feeder. Your next question is probably going to be "Where do I buy a feeder?"

That question can be answered easily and leaves you with many options to try. There is no proper answer or proper place from which to buy your feeder. Whether you buy one off the ever popular internet or whether you go in to a store and buy it is purely personal.

For my part I'm more old school and like to see what I'm getting before I actually buy something, but recent tentative forays that I've made into the world of internet buying has shown me that there's nothing wrong with buying off the internet. Like I said the choice is personal rather than anything else, but here's a (hopefully), handy list of places from where you can buy your feeders.

The Internet

The shop of choice for a lot of people, this option saves you time and sheer effort since you have the luxury of making your purchases from the comfort of your home. Typing in a simple phrase like "Where to buy bird feeders" into your favorite search engine will yield a multitude of results from which you can choose whichever one catches your eye. The advantage to internet shopping is that you're spoiled for choice whereas with a normal shop all you have is what you'd find in-store.

The Pet Store

If you don't want the internet option then this is your next best choice since your pet store generally carries anything and everything that you could ever want or need that has to do with animals. Appropriate bird seed is also probably available for you to buy along with friendly advice on how best to proceed in your new hobby.

A Specialty Store

These are just the ticket if you can find one in your neighborhood and they should carry just about everything that an ardent birder needs, from suet cages to hummingbird feeders to binoculars and seeds, with an added touch of birding books and bird houses.





Specialty bird stores can however tend to be slightly pricey so know your facts and figures before you shell out too much on that one-of-a-kind bird feeder.

A Garden Shop

This is another good place in which to find your birding needs. Garden shops are in abundance these days and most will carry a number of odds and ends with birding material strewn literally about them. Here, you should be able to find generic feeders that will also complement your garden.

Department Stores: Garden Section

Most large department stores will usually have a garden section and you should be able to find all you need here although your choices might be considerably less than anywhere else. However, along with the basic feeders you might come across the more elaborate feeders which will cost you a pretty penny but which will enhance the look of your garden as well as attract birds.

The Hardware Shop

This one might be a bit of a puzzler but it serves a dual purpose. Firstly in the larger, big name hardware stores you might come across a garden section in which case you'll find your bird feeders.

However my main purpose in mentioning hardware shops as places to get your bird feeders lies in the abundance of material you can find there to build your own feeders. So, unlikely though it is, a hardware store is also a good place to find your bird feeder, albeit in bird feeder kits with pieces that require thought and assembly.





How long should your bird feeder last

Naturally the answer to this question depends entirely upon the quality of your bird feeder. I've found however that most bird feeders, regardless of price, will last at least as long as two to three years if taken care of regularly. This also takes into account only minimally harsh weather conditions.

I wouldn't necessarily guarantee that your bird feeder, no matter how sturdy and durable, would last through a hurricane or tornado or even an especially harsh blizzard. So, barring unforeseen problems and weather events, how long should your bird feeder last?

It's largely dependant upon quality of construction and the quality of materials used for your bird feeder. A really good, sturdily built durable bird feeder constructed from the finest of materials can last anywhere upwards of two to three years without too much of a problem. And if you take care of it and maintain your feeder regularly that estimate should go up considerably.

You need to be realistic about these things as well though. Besides the freakish weather conditions that I mentioned, your bird feeder will be subject to normal weather conditions and these will all take their toll on it as well. Sunlight, rain, frost, even light winds can all leave their mark upon your feeder. In these cases you probably won't even notice the wear and tear that occurs until your feeder actually falls apart in your hands leaving you with a pack of hungry birds and no feeder. (Not a scene out of Hitchcock's famous "Birds" I promise you!)

Also if you invest in one of the nylon socks used as a thistle feeder (see the section on "Thistle or Nyjer feeder") there's a good probability that your feeder won't last for more than a year or so. All estimates are just that of course, estimates and your ten year old thistle sock feeder, hanging full of Nyjer seeds, is probably mocking me right now.

Having said all of that though, when you're buying your new bird feeder look for the warranty you'll be getting. Some brands, like the Droll Yankee brand feeders, provide a lifetime guarantee for their feeders. Some of the feeders even have a warranty against squirrel damage! From my experience this only makes the feeders squirrel resistant to a greater degree and not completely squirrel proof. I have yet to see the squirrel who hasn't found a way around any of the so-called squirrel proofing methods!

On the other hand, if you decide to construct your bird feeder yourself you'll have more of a say in the longevity of your feeder than you would





otherwise. You'll have the choice of making your feeder from the finest materials around or you could even make it from scraps of lumber and such that you know won't last out the year.

If you enjoy building things and choose to do it this way, then you always have the option of tearing down your old feeder and replacing it with a newer, cleaner feeder every year. You'll still need to clean the feeder regularly, but in this way you can be assured that whatever germs and bacteria have burrowed their way into your feeder won't live for a long time.





Why Have a Bird Feeder

There could be many reasons why you're thinking about having a bird feeder: you're interested in wild life and helping them; you like birds; you want to do all you can to help the environment; your next door neighbor's kid has one so your kid wants one also. The list is endless and can go on and on with as many variations on the theme as possible.

But one of the best reasons that I can think of, why most of us would want a bird feeder is for the pure and simple joy we get from watching the birds flocking to our yards and our feeders. Not to mention the warm fuzzy feeling we get when we know we've done good.

All of these aside though what are the advantages you get from putting up a bird feeder in your yard, and what are the disadvantages. Well, on first glance the disadvantages seem to far outweigh the advantages.

For instance,

if you start feeding the birds in your area you should continue doing this unabated at least until such time as the birds can find abundant nourishment on their own you'll need to regularly clean out your feeders, and more so during summer time you'll need to foot the bill not only for your own food but also for the birds' food as well birds are messy eaters, you'll have a huge mess around the area of your feeders constantly since squirrels like seed as well as any type of free handouts you'll have to contend with them if you don't like the furry little monsters

What about the advantages though? What possible advantage could outweigh such a number of obvious disadvantages?

Well, for starters,

it's a pleasurable past time that the whole family can enjoy you're helping the birds in your area to find food, especially in the food scarce months of winter if you live in the urban sprawl you're helping to provide food regularly in an area that doesn't have an abundant supply of food and let's not forget that warm fuzzy feeling

For me it's that last point that makes bird feeding one of my favorite past times, followed closely by bird watching of course!





Maintenance

Proper maintenance of your bird feeder is essential, especially if you want to have a healthy bird population in your backyard. Bird disease is a serious problem and if you don't clean out your feeder regularly you could be unwittingly contributing to the spread of disease amongst the birds.

Some feeders might be difficult to clean out, but by and large most bird feeders are relatively easy to clean and maintain. By the same token if you have bird baths and bird houses as well these too will need to be cleaned regularly to avoid the spread of disease.

A few simple steps can help to keep your backyard bird population safe and will provide a clean environment for them to roam around in.

For Normal Bird Feeders

Bird feeders should ideally be cleaned at least once or twice every month, especially if you're a year-round bird feeder. Clear away old seeds and hulls from the feeder and if possible immerse your feeder in a bleach solution. Remember to rinse thoroughly to take away the bleach. Barring that, use the bleach solution only once a month and wash the feeder out properly again within two weeks of the bleach cleaning.

The bleach solution is generally taken at 1 part bleach to nine parts water (which is basically a ten percent bleach solution), but you can change it to suit your needs. I would advise against using a stronger bleach solution however, as this might affect the birds in an unknown manner.

All animals are more sensitive than humans and we have no way of knowing exactly what they might be feeling from the use of bleach. So keep the bleach usage to a minimum unless of course disease has already spread amongst the birds – this could have happened from some other source, and need not have necessarily come from your feeding station. If you find that the birds coming to your yard are already disease ridden then clean out your feeder more regularly to ensure that the spread is kept to as minimum as possible.

Another thing to take note of, is if you have a wooden bird feeder. In which case you should replace your bleach solution with another disinfectant since bleach will fade the wood and help the deterioration process to speed up.

For Hummingbird Feeders or Oriole Feeders

Your hummingbird nectar feeder requires a slightly different cleaning method than your other feeders as parts of the plastic or glass bottle are





sometimes hard to reach using the more conventional methods and might not clean the hummingbird feeder tube properly.

For this then, you can use either the same 10 percent bleach solution or a light soap solution to clean the tube. Just add a handful of uncooked rice, or an equally small pulse or grain, to the solution and shake the mixture. The grain will then act as a marvelous cleaner scrubbing away at all the old residue.

Hummingbird feeders should also be cleaned at least once a week as opposed to the normal twice a month. This is due entirely to the sticky sweet nectar that can cause a build up on the walls of the feeding tube and cause mold to grow on the tube walls.

The Area around your Bird Feeder

Birds are notoriously messy eaters and are indiscriminate about where they relieve themselves, so the area in, around, and under your bird feeder should be swept or raked clean to remove old discarded items of food or seeds. Bird droppings should be removed as well.

When carrying out any cleaning remember to always wear gloves as disease causing parasites and germs can live for a surprising number of days in food and droppings.

Water Troughs and Bird Baths

Water in any form, be it in bird baths or small water troughs for birds should be cleaned out even more regularly than the feeders themselves as water can spread disease faster than anything else can. Scrub any such containers well and rinse before refilling with fresh water. For more on this go to the "Water" section.

* * * * *

Keeping your own bird feeder can be a fun and great way to get in some bird watching but remember that regular maintenance is a must so if you don't think you can handle the constant maintenance think twice before investing in a bird feeder.

Another possibility is to only take advantage of the winter months for bird feeding thereby ensuring that you only have to keep up the regular maintenance for a few months of the year.





Seasonal or Annual

You'll also want to think about one more point when you're setting up your bird feeder, and that's whether you're going to be doing this seasonally or annually. Granted a lot depends on this besides your own preferences as well, but there's no denying that it too should figure prominently in your decisions.

One of the most important deciding factors can be where you live. If you live in the migratory paths that birds will be taking every year, then you'll also have those seasons to consider along with the normal winter season.

So you could either decide to set up your feeders only for winter time, when most birds are unable to find adequate nourishment and supply them with it all winter long.

Or you could just take on the fall migratory season when there'll be a lot of birds flocking to your feeders to stock up on nourishment for the long journey ahead.

Alternately you could consider the spring time migration when birds will be needing to replenish their energy stores from a long voyage back.

Then there'll be the long hot months of summer. Food at this time will be mostly abundant, but in some areas, like dab smack in the middle of the city, some birds won't be getting the nourishment they so desperately need.

So you have a choice. You could take on any of these seasons singly or in groups, perhaps the just the two migratory seasons, especially if you don't enjoy trudging out in the snow to fill up your feeder. But then again you might want to include winter in your bird feeding calendar as well. In which case, you'll need to be prepared to take on three fourths of the year for your bird feeding activities.

Or you could just throw in the towel and say that you'll go it for the whole year. After all what's one more season added to the others.

The choice is entirely up to you and what you feel inclined to do, but remember that bird feeding shouldn't be a chore, it should be a fun pastime. Also, for all these seasons although the time of day will vary slightly most birds will come to your feeders early in the morning or towards late evening. These are the times they need to stock up on their energy sources the most so make sure the feeders are filled at these times.





Types of different feeders

This is the section that you’ve been waiting for so eagerly. Here, I’ll try and give you a detailed account on the different types of feeders available. If you know what you want in your bird feeder then you can simply skip through to that section, or you could just take a leisurely stroll through the fascinating world of bird feeders.

Below is a list of feeders that I’ve reviewed with details of each one following thereafter.

- Platform feeder
- Hopper
- Seed Tube feeder
- Thistle, or Nyjer feeder
- Nectar Tube feeder
- Hummingbird feeder
- Oriole feeder
- Suet bird feeder
- Ground feeder
- Squirrel proof feeders

Platform feeder

The platform feeder is the simplest type of feeder that you can get and in its most basic form merely consists of a single platform or tray on which you can place your bird feed. This initial design of course can vary and there are a great many feeders out there which have incorporated the original platform design and given it a slight twist. These come in the form of hoppers or gazebo feeders, and even the ground feeders have only taken the basic platform design and changed it accordingly.

However if we go back to the original single platform design there are many ways that you’ll find this to be of great asset to you. If you’re thinking of setting up a bird feeding station for the first time in your garden the easiest feeder that you could manage would be the platform feeder.

Initially you wouldn’t even need to buy one as this type of feeder is easy to make. An old baking tray or large piece of flat wood that’s been lying around your garden shed is good enough. All you’ll need to do is either nail this onto a handy post or place it on an old stool or patio table. And in the blink of an eye you have your first feeder. If you’ll remember, that’s how I got my first feeder as well, and there wasn’t anything wrong with that for a goodly number of years.





Of course with this type of feeder there are a few problems that offset the ease of its design. If it's being nailed into place then you'll need to make sure that there are enough drainage holes in it to drain out any excess rain water. And you will need to clean it out more often if the weather turns nasty, before the seed rots.

You also now have the added problem that smaller birds might not always be able to get at the feed due to overcrowding by the bigger birds. And let's not forget our little squirrel friends. They're always opportunistic little thieves and will pounce with greedy delight on all that you've left on the feeder tray.

You'll find that the pro's and con's of the platform feeder generally balance each other out, and if it's your first time at feeding the birds in your yard then this type of feeder is really a good first-time feeder for you to try your hand on.

Since these can easily be made at home the price ranges for these feeders will start with the cost of your time and effort and rise from there to encompass whatever else it is that manufacturers feel platform feeders need, to be complete.

Hopper

The hopper feeder also sometimes referred to as the Gazebo feeder is also at its most basic level just the platform feeder with a roof. However, unlike your most basic platform feeders these little beauties can vary in design until they resemble nothing so much as upscale feeding mansions. These will of course be on the pricey end of things but for a general range of between eight and twenty dollars, you should be able to find a hopper feeder that will suit you.

Keeping in mind that any hopper feeder you buy should have a roof and walls to resemble a small house or gazebo, there are a few more things that you'll need to look for when making your initial purchase.

Hoppers are generally good at resisting most weather conditions and should protect your seed fairly well up to a certain point, but since they're not weather proof you'll need to check your seed regularly during rainy or humid days, as the seed may grow moldy.

Hoppers are also a good choice if you don't want to be forever loading your feeder. Most hoppers will have the ability to hold a fairly large capacity of seed which should last you for a few days at least, even when the birds are in a feeding frenzy. On other normal days when you don't get as many birds a full hopper will ensure that you have less work and that you won't need to be continually trudging up and down to fill it.





This can be a good thing especially in the cold winter weather where dressing to go outside, leaving your toasty warm house becomes a chore. Even for someone like myself who enjoys placing out the seed, when it comes to the biting cold and freezing winds I much prefer to use my hopper as it was meant to be and load it up to full capacity.

Hoppers can be mounted either on a pole or ledge, or they can even be hung from a Shepard's crook or a suitably strong branch. Be cautious though in hanging it from a branch as all sorts of problems might beset you, from rain dripping into your feed to squirrels continually raiding the feeder.

As always, most problems can be overcome with a simple step and buying or making your own baffle can reduce both the risk of stormy weather conditions and squirrels. If you just ask at your pet store about what type of baffles they carry you can then make a decision based on what your feeder type is.

Seed Tube feeder

There are two types of tube feeders available today and both serve different purposes. The first of which, is what we're talking about now and is the hanging seed tube feeder. As you might have guessed this feeder is solely for carrying various seeds, and has been built as such.

Again, as implied by the title, the seed tube feeder is tubular in design. The length of this feeder varies according to how much seed you want it to carry. Most feeders will have a number of perches placed around it with the feeding port located almost immediately above it. Generally due to the small size of the perches attached to these feeders, you'll only be able to attract small birds to your feeders. This is also a plus if you want to discourage large birds from raiding your feeders.

When you're buying your tube feeder always make sure that they're easy to clean as maintenance is a must. Additionally the seeds should be guarded against rain by the tubing without allowing any water to enter and allow the seeds to rot.

Seed tube feeders will take almost any type of seed but due to the differences in seed sizes, with some seeds being extremely small, special feeders have been built to handle these situations. One of these is the Nyjer feeder, and another is the Peanut feeder, and I've discussed the Nyjer feeder below in greater detail.

The peanut feeder along with the Sunflower feeder and any other type of seed feeder works along the same principles as the normal seed tube feeder and the Nyjer feeder. I felt that a recap of everything that I've





mentioned either here or in the Nyjer feeder section would only bore you if I went into detail about all the various seed feeders available.

You might also find that some feeder tubes come with extension tubes which you can attach varyingly. With these, when your seed level gets low the seed stored in the top, in the extension tubes, will fill up the normal tube so your higher perching birds aren't left without food. This doesn't mean that you won't need to fill it up like you normally do, because you will, only not as often and if you forget for a day or two, you won't need to worry that there won't be enough feeding ports available, since with the extension tube all the ports will be available.

Seed tube feeders can be either pole mounted on a Shepard's crook or they can be hung from the nearest convenient tree branch or post. As with all feeders squirrels are a problem for the tube feeders but this can be overcome by placing a baffle on top over your feeder. This will also protect it from adverse weather conditions as well as from squirrels. Be warned though, squirrels are cunning and will probably find a way to overcome your baffle. But it's also quite fun watching them try!

Thistle or Nyjer feeder

A thistle, or Nyjer, feeder is ideal if you want to attract Pine Siskins or Finches to your backyard garden bird feeder. Most times the Nyjer feeders are also referred to as Finch feeders as well. This is due mainly to the fact that you would find mostly finches attracted to your feeders since they seem to prefer the Nyjer seeds.

Nyjer feeders differ from other feeders in that they're made specially to hold the small Nyjer or thistle seeds that finches and siskins seem to favor so much. These feeders come in a variety of different styles with the most basic design being that of a closely woven nylon sock or sack.

Most of these socks come with eye pleasing designs that will blend in well with your garden and its surroundings. If you prefer plain socks however that too can be accomplished quite easily and you need only to ask. Although the mesh of these socks is durable enough to withstand tiny clawing feet the lifetime of these probably won't be as long as it would be for the sturdier more expensive feeders.

Another advantage that you get with these sock feeders comes from the fact that only finches or siskins can have access to the seeds – larger birds will find it impossible to cling to the mesh and feed. Or if you still prefer the mesh method but prefer a more durable feeder, you could always go in for the wire mesh feeders that are available.





These feeders will also most times offer you cover from the elements for your seeds as well as proper air flow to keep the seeds fresh. An added benefit of this feeder is that it's more durable than its nylon sock counterpart. If you're thinking of investing in one of these however, first make sure to check that there are no sharp wire edges sticking out which could harm either you or the birds. The design should be such that at no point would the wire cause any harm.

If you want a Nyjer feeder that's more durable than either the sock or the mesh counterparts then go in for the tube feeders and you'll also get value for money as these feeders come in a variety of lovely designs and sizes. Expense isn't too much of a problem either as some of these feeders are priced only slightly higher than the mesh feeders. Just as with the other two feeders, these Nyjer feeders have been designed to attract only the smaller bird varieties, and not the larger ones.

So to that extent small perches have been added all around with feeding ports accessible next to these. These feeders are also generally weather resistant as well, and will provide shelter for your seeds from the elements. Most will also have tough see through plastic tubing for easy visibility of the food level.

One particularly lovely feeder is the patented "Perky-Pet Upside Down Thistle Feeder". This amazing feeder is ingeniously designed to take advantage of the finches and siskins' acrobatic abilities which enable them to eat even whilst perched upside down. As you may or may not have guessed the feeding ports for each small perch is situated below the perch as opposed to just above it. What this means is that the birds have to hang upside down to feed. A more lovely sight I have yet to see, and this is one feeder that I consider truly value for money.

Barring the sock mesh feeders most other feeders will generally come with a warranty of some sort or other, with the some brands supplying a lifetime warranty as well. Price ranges for Nyjer feeders can start from as low as one dollar for the sock mesh feeder, and go to upwards of about forty to fifty dollars for the fancier Nyjer feeders. Most feeders however stay within a range of between five to twenty dollars and are generally quite well built.

Nectar Tube feeder

The nectar tube feeder is the second type of tube feeder (the seed tube feeder was the first), and that's where the similarity ends. Whereas the seed feeder had multiple ports reaching up all the way to almost the top of the feeder tube, the nectar feeder has only a few ports and these are located at the bottom.

Since these feeders are intended primarily for the usage of birds such as hummers or Orioles the feeding ports are generally to be found located at





the bottom of the tube ending either in wells or small ports which the birds can use to draw nectar out of.

You might see other birds such as tanagers or cardinals at these feeders also, but mostly only if the tubes end in small wells, as the other type of feeder ports are fitted mainly for the use of hummers and orioles.

If you're thinking of buying a nectar feeder then you should also think about getting an ant or bee guard to place around it. Some people put oil around the mouths of the feeder ports but I wouldn't recommend this method as the oil might get into the nectar and contaminate it. However there are cheap and easy-to-manage bee and ant guards which you can readily fix onto your nectar feeders.

One of these comes in the form a little moat preventing the ants from invading your feeder and finding nectar heaven. A possible bee guard which I found to be quite excellent works similarly along the lines of a squirrel baffle but instead of using the bees' negligible weight against it this baffle uses the weight of the bird against the bee.

In other words only when a bird lands on the counterbalanced perches will the feeders open. Until then the feeding ports will stay firmly shut not allowing the bees, access to the nectar inside. This is one of the better nectar feeders I found that incorporated a bee guard naturally into its design, and I one that I found worked quite well.

Hummingbird feeder

If a hummingbird feeder is basically a nectar feeder then you're probably wondering why there's a separate section on it. There's only one reason really. Although your most basic hummingbird feeder is the nectar tube feeder, hummingbird feeders also come in many varieties that differ from this original design.

First of all I feel I should mention that if you want to attract hummingbirds to your yard either you should have red flowers or have your feeder colored a bright red. Hummers love the color red and will wing their way swiftly towards anything they see as red. So plant some red flowering trees and bushes, or paint your feeder such a bright red that even a bull would notice it, but don't use colored nectar in your feeders as this can prove to be harmful to the little birds. Alternately just place your feeder in amongst a patch of red flowers as this will also work.

Another thing that you should be aware of is that hummers are notoriously territorial creatures and will fight any other hummer fiercely to protect what it considers its own, so you have a choice when placing your feeders. Either space them wide enough apart that it won't be considered as part of





one territory, or place them all together so that there's too many feeders for one hummer to protect.

That said, going back to the actual subject of hummingbird feeders let me just say that if you take a minute and take stock of all the hummingbird feeders that are available to you, you might not be able to make a decision with any real clarity.

It's true that there are more types of feeders than there are birds, but with hummingbird feeders this is especially true, with a veritable plethora of feeders out there to greet you as soon as you step outside the door and go shopping for one.

You'll find yourself inundated by feeders in various shapes, like apples and strawberries, and sizes ranging from feeders that will feed one or two birds up to ones that will feed more birds than you can count on two hands. There'll be feeders with glass etchings, and feeders with copper decorations, or copper tops and feeding ports. Some feeders will come in plastic and you'll find some that come in glass. Some of them will be see-through allowing you to see the nectar level, and some of them will be completely covered but will come with a nectar gauge to be able to see how much nectar is left inside.

The list is endless and can go on forever. If you're truly interested in hummingbirds and their feeders you can even make your garden into a hummer haven and a sight to behold and for all to admire. Stringing these feeders up in suitable places can have great effect in your garden as they can turn it into a place to be "oohed" and "ahhed" over – a veritable magical fairy land.

Oriole feeder

An oriole feeder is much like a normal nectar feeder and fulfills much the same purpose. You might be wondering then why there's a different feeder specially built for orioles. It could be just some marketing gimmick thought up by some clever marketing strategist or it could be filling an actual purpose. I like to think that it's both.

You will often find orioles at humming bird feeders and vice versa, so you might be wondering if it's worth your while to buy a separate feeder. Only you can answer that question but if it's orioles you want to attract to your garden then you're probably better off with a specially built oriole feeder in your garden.

What's the difference then that you would find in an oriole feeder as opposed to a hummingbird feeder? To begin with oriole feeders will be bright orange in color and not red since orioles seem to prefer the orange





color over anything else. Oriole feeders will also most of the time come equipped to handle both nectar feed and oranges or small cups of grape jelly. Orioles will be attracted to any one of these offerings and won't reject them out of hand.

So you'll have the choice of getting a feeder that's geared primarily for nectar, fruits or for both nectar and fruits. A nectar feeder will sometimes have only the ability to dispense nectar from its feeding slots, whereas other feeders might come with the capabilities of skewering orange halves onto the feeder or little slots for spoons of grape jelly, along with little wells specially placed for nectar. Which feeder you go in for depends on whether you want to maintain a nectar-only feeder or whether you'll take the time and trouble to place oranges or grape jelly on the feeder for the orioles.

As with all feeders the oriole feeders need to be cleaned regularly and when you're buying your feeder you should choose one that's easy to clean especially if you're going to place nectar in it as the sweet sugared water can ferment quickly and even grow mold if left untended for long.

Another good thing to look out for in your feeder is if there is a bee and ant guard on it. The nectar isn't only palatable to orioles and hummingbirds but is universally adored by all bees and ants as well. So if you don't want to be forever finding unwanted visitors at your feeder you should also make sure to fit your feeder with a special bee and ant guard like of the types that I mentioned in the "Hummingbird feeders" section just earlier.

You'll find that the most basic oriole feeders come at an accommodating price of upwards of five dollars. These are generally alright feeders and would be particularly good if you're only trying out the feeders for the first time and are unsure whether you'll be able to attract orioles to your garden.

Suet feeder

Suet feeders are basically any type of feeder that can hold suet or suet mixtures without problem. This doesn't mean that platform or hopper feeders are a good idea, you really wouldn't want bits of suet going everywhere. You would find this to be the case if you didn't use a proper feeder to give the suet in.

Suet is a high energy high protein bird food that's basically, rendered meat fat. It can be bought at any butcher's shop, or readymade in little balls or cakes which you can place in your feeder immediately with no fuss or hassle.

Wire mesh suet feeders come in both the top loading varieties and the bottom opening ones. With the bottom opening suet feeders, large birds





like starlings are unable to reach the suet inside since they need to feed hanging upside down, and so instead leave the way for smaller birds to come to it.

The ones with the top openings however are considered a free-for-all and it's generally first come, first serve with these. Most suet feeders however will be this way with only the bottom opening feeders deterring the larger birds. Feeders will generally be open on all sides and are comprised of a simple mesh bag, or a wire cage.

Some feeders will come in the form of logs and I've given some instruction on how to make one in the section on "How to build your own bird feeder". For the log suet feeders there are a few holes drilled into the log, into which you fill a suet mixture. As suet feeders should be hung close to tree trunks where most birds who eat suet will prefer to feed, you should be careful of squirrels who also love to dine on this tasty treat.

As ever there are squirrel baffles that you can use but I won't mention it again here as you've already probably gotten an earful about it.

However, if you use a suet feeder you'll attract birds that you otherwise wouldn't have if you used only seed feeders. But you'll also find that seed feeders or hopper feeders have the dual ability to dispense suet as well. These dispensers can be placed on either side of a feeder in a wire mesh cage, or they can even be simple caged suet feeders that can be hung from a small hook on the bottom of the hopper or gazebo style feeders. In these cases a pine cone suet feeder looks attractive when hanging from the bottom. For instructions on how to make this go to the section marked "Pine Cone Suet Feeder".

Window bird feeder

Although it might sound quite out of this world there is a bird feeder which you can place on your windows, and is naturally enough, called a Window Feeder. They're not entirely new inventions and have been around for some time. But unlike the window feeders of old these newer window feeders are mostly very easy to fix on to your windows, with the easiest ones coming equipped with durable extra-strength suction cups to hold fast to your window.

If you decide to check out the window feeders as an option for your bird feeding station you'll find yourself confronted by a large choice of feeders all of which are quite attractive. Most however will come with a plastic film that's a one way mirror from which you can watch the birds but from which the birds can't see you and get scared away. The only downside to this is that the mirror is only on the portion where the feeder is attached to your window. If you make any sudden movements that are visible over





the top of the mirror you might still scare away the birds. One way to get over this is to buy more of the mirror like plastic film for the rest of your window as well.

Despite any misgivings you might have, window feeders are safe to use and won't cause birds to bump into your windows as they need to slow down considerably on approach to your feeder. Don't however, hang any plants near the window as the birds might mistake it for convenient cover from lurking predators and fly into it anyway.

With the right window feeder you'll also get convenience added on top of everything else of being able to fill the feeder from inside the house itself without disturbing the feeding birds. It's also great on a cold winter's day to be able to watch the birds from just in front of the feeder without having to go out into the cold.

Your window feeder should ideally come with a roof – preferably sloping for snow and rain water to run off it – and be easy to clean. This might not come with the less expensive models however, but even these should have some protection from the elements. If not, then shop around for another feeder that will protect your seed from adverse weather conditions.

Window feeders come in all shapes and sizes and you can even find suet feeders and hummingbird feeders that will readily suction on to your windows. My favorite though is the "snack" feeder. These window feeders are small in size and hold only a small amount of seed in it but are small enough not to obstruct your view and handy if you don't want anything bigger to contend with.

These small feeders can come in larger sizes too where they can hold up to three to four types of seed. These are also good if you want to attach it to your office window and enjoy the sight of birds feeding even during the office hours. I work in a relatively small building so I don't have a problem keeping these feeders out on my window and have done the same for my home office as well.

Window feeders, due to their very nature can tend to get very expensive but a small feeder like the snack feeder or even a window mounted hummingbird feeder can cost you less than ten dollars.

Most feeders however, and I'm talking about the elaborate ones which I'm constantly drooling over, can go anywhere upwards of fifty dollars with some of them even going over the hundred dollar mark. If you have to be realistic like me though, then you always have a variety of window feeders to choose from which fall into mid category range and are quite affordable.





Ground feeder

Not all birds appreciate having to get their food from a raised platform or even to get it from a tubular feeder. In fact some birds prefer the ground and no matter what you do will be foraging around on the ground around your raised feeders looking for discarded seeds.

These birds will almost never feed off a raised bird feeder and would probably only consider it if there were no other choice. Although, through the years I have noticed that a few of the ground feeding birds have absolutely no idea that they're supposed to be ground feeders and will come time and again to my raised platform feeder instead!

If you're thinking of attracting birds such as northern cardinals, mourning doves, and wood pigeons to your garden then the ground feeder's the way you'll want to go. Similar in design to hoppers or platform feeders, the only real difference you'll get with a ground feeder is the fact that it's closer to the ground.

Normally a ground feeder sits only a few inches off the ground but this can be circumvented and turned to your advantage so that instead of a ground feeder you have a normal platform feeder instead. Just place it on a raised surface like a patio table to convert the feeder into a raised feeder.

With a ground feeder you'll always have that choice and unlike other feeders which are generally staked into place in your garden you always have the option of moving your feeder to a new location when necessity rings its bell.

On the subject of squirrel proofing the ground feeder I've found that there's a mixed bag of tales. Some birders will tell you that ground feeders are absolutely squirrel and raccoon proof, whilst others will stare disbelievably at you if you even say that. They've found that this simply isn't the case. Most times squirrels or raccoons will find a way to get at those seeds, even if it means tumbling the feeder over.

Don't laugh at that notion either, remember "if there's a will there's a way" and this is especially true where bird feeders, and squirrels and raccoons are concerned. Just in case you haven't guessed I'm one of the people who'll just stare disbelievably into your face if you tell me that ground feeders are critter proof. I've just had too many tussles with them to believe otherwise. But hey, if you can find a way to critter proof your ground feeder then good for you, and perhaps you could drop me a line telling me how to do it as well!

Anyway like I was saying, a ground feeding station is built along similar lines to a hopper or platform feeder and is just as easy to maintain, if not easier





sometimes. You can even build one yourself, and you should be able to find some instructions on this in the section called "Building your own bird feeder".

Most ground feeders are merely platforms with raised sides to keep the food in. Some might come with raised "roofs" and these are the ones that are more in the style of hoppers. If it only comes with a roof and no walls as such these are referred to as fly-through platform ground feeders.

Some of them will come with a wire meshing around it and it's these feeders that help to keep the squirrels at bay for even a little while. Ground feeders these days however have a sturdy wire mesh instead of a platform to hold the seed as this allows for better drainage and will keep the seeds fresher for longer.

Another advantage you get with a ground feeder is that during winter time you can just up and bring your feeder onto your back porch or somewhere closer to your house to make it easier for you to fill it on a regular basis. Also, you'll find that if you haven't already squirrel-proofed your feeder you'll be getting a few of those "pesky" critters ambling right up to your back door in winter time. And as fun as it is to watch birds, I've found that watching these little creatures is just as fun and enjoyable.

With most ground feeders you'll find that you'll also be able to place a larger amount of seed in the feeder than you would with a raised feeder. And for the most part I've found that the sturdier well built ground feeders tended to last longer than any of my other feeders. This could of course be due to the fact that there's less wind buffeting them and less exposure to the elements since I lug it closer to home in the winter months.

A few things that you'll have to be aware of with ground feeders even more than with other feeders is the presence of natural predators such as cats. Although I go into more detail in the "Precautions" section entitled "Cats" I feel that I should just mention that ground feeding birds are more vulnerable and open to being pounced upon by any cats within the area. So, special thought should be given to the placement of your feeder if you're thinking of investing in a ground feeder.

Rats are another problem that you might want to take into consideration as they'll consider any food left out on ground level to be for them. Don't despair however there are ways and means of discouraging all but the most determined of creatures. Any pet store or specialty store can help you with this should you need it.

However that may be, ground feeders are a great plus if you're into bird feeding and the price ranges aren't too bad either.





Squirrel proof feeders

You know you want a bird feeder but you also know that you have an abundance of squirrels in your yard. There's only one thing for it then and that's for you to get a squirrel proof feeder. And just as there's an abundance of squirrels in your yard you'll also find that there's an abundance of squirrel proof feeders available as well.

This is of course only due to the fact that for every squirrel proof device that's been made there's been at least one squirrel who has "boldly gone" where no squirrel has before and paved the way for all squirrel-kind to follow.

So the battle still rages on and it's doubtful as to whether man or manufacturer will ever come out on top against the squirrels. What is certain is that whilst we keep buying bird feeders the next, bigger (or smaller), better squirrel proof baffle will always be there for us to use.

How will you know which of these devices is the right one for you though? You won't, at least not at first and it will take a little trial and error before you can find out which baffle will hold out the longest against our furry enemies. After that it's just a matter of staying one step ahead of them and buying, or making newer baffles.

The other option is to give in entirely to an animal with a brain the size of a large pea and cry "uncle". I'm not ashamed to admit that I've done this long ago, and have given in entirely. My garden is therefore now not only overrun by birds seeking food, but by squirrels as well. And the abuse I get by both parties if I'm even a few minutes late in distributing the food is overwhelming.

Another easy way to discourage the furry monsters from taking your seed is to replace it with safflower and Nyjer or thistle seed. I've found that they absolutely won't go anywhere near it.

However, here's a list of the different types of baffles that are available for you to buy on the market right now. This list might not be complete and is probably even slightly outdated since squirrel baffles are somewhat like computers and are obsolete even before they hit the market.

Counterbalance

Placing a counterbalance on the perches of your feeder should make it difficult for the little creatures to get at the seed. This works by closing the feeder ports should anything heavier than a small bird perch on it.





Domed Cover

This is generally used to cover feeder tubes and can work in two ways. It can either be stationary and very slippery allowing the squirrel no purchase or it can tilt with squirrel's weight throwing it off the top. These can generally be fitted over an existing feeder which was purchased separately.

Extended Feeding Port

This is an extension tube that you can fit onto most hopper or gazebo feeders and will only give access for birds to get the seed. It can be very frustrating for squirrels indeed.

Electric Rotator

This is basically like the Dome Cover baffle but works on a small supply of electricity instead. When the squirrel jumps onto the cover its weight activates the motor and it twirls the whole device flinging the squirrel away.

Caged Bird Feeder

This is typically a bird feeder enclosed in a cage that only small birds can get through and not squirrels.

Cover for your Pole

You can also find a cover for your pole or Shepard's crook that will fit on to the base. It's somewhat similar in design to the dome covers but fits onto the bottom instead. A good height to place them is about 5-6 feet off the ground. This is about the height that squirrels can jump to and with that in their path they'll be unable to jump on to the pole. Climbing is also an impossibility as they will encounter the cover before they can get too far.

Additionally...

For each feeder that I've listed there is a range of modifications that can come along with it so I'll mention the possibilities here without going into it in each and everyone.

Bird feeders can and will come in every size, shape, color and variety that you can think of and there's bound to be a feeder to suit your needs. These are some of the design additions that you're most likely to come across and they include, but are not limited to,

- Metal bird feeders
- Wooden feeders
- Coppertop feeders





Metal feeders

As you might have guessed these feeders are made out of metal. The metals used in these designs however are rust proof and are powder coated to withstand many of the harsher elements of Mother Nature. These feeders come in many elegant designs and can be found in many pet stores.

Wooden feeders

Wooden feeders are popular amongst many people due to its natural design element. Most wooden feeders you'll find are made out of Cedar which is a good wood from which to make bird feeders as it ages well.

These feeders can make a stylish addition to your garden and also make a great housewarming gift. I should know I gave one to myself when I moved in to my new home – as did most of my friends and family! Some of them however were innovative enough to get me some gorgeous copper topped feeders though which is the next subject up on the board.

Copper feeders

I've made no secret of my obsession with birds and bird feeding and I appreciate every one of the feeders I've received, but I have to say that on design value alone the copper feeders are by far my favorite. (I hope that didn't sound ungrateful because I'm not – each and every one of those house warming gifts have found their way to my yard and are even now full of birdseed.) The copper feeders though add a distinctive touch to any garden and also come in lovely designs.

Which feeders for which birds

If you have a particular bird in mind then it helps in choosing your feeder to know which one that it might go to. This isn't a hard and fast rule and should only be used as a guideline. If you're not too worried about which particular species of bird comes into your garden then it doesn't really matter what type of feeder you choose, all that matters then is that you place it properly and in an appealing enough manner to attract the bird population in your area.

However just to clarify matters a little, below is a small list of which feeders suit which type of birds. Not all birds have been included in this list as the task is beyond my scope at the moment, but I have tried to include some of the more common birds.

Hopper Feeder

- Finches, Juncos, Titmice,
- Sparrows, Nuthatches, Chickadees





Platform Feeder

- Towhees, Blue Jays, Cardinals,
- White-throated Sparrows, Juncos,
- House Finches, Purple Finches,
- Tree Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows

Seed Tube Feeder

- Pine siskins, Goldfinches, Titmice,
- Chickadees, Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, Redpolls

Seed Tube Feeder with platform

- Cardinals, Blue Jays, Crossbills
- Purple Finches, White-throated Sparrow,
- White-crowned Sparrows, House Finches

Nectar Tube Feeder

- Hummingbirds, Orioles, Tanagers, Cardinals,

Suet Feeder

- Chickadees, Titmice, Cardinals,
- Starlings, Nuthatches, Wrens,
- Woodpeckers, Kinglets, Creepers

Ground Feeder

- Chickadees, Juncos, Mockingbirds,
- Grackles, Sparrows, Woodpeckers,

Nyjer Feeder

- Pine siskins, Goldfinches, Titmice,
- Chickadees, Song Sparrows,
- Purple Finches, Redpolls,
- Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows





Where to place your bird feeder

Where to place your feeder is almost as important as whether you're going to buy a feeder. Without the correct placement you could be faced with the prospect of not having any birds come to your feeder. So what's the ideal place to keep your feeder?

This depends on a few factors, some of the chief ones being squirrels, cats, and plant cover. If you want to escape ravenous squirrels then you'll need to find a spot where you can be assured that squirrels can't jump from (a rule of thumb is that most squirrels can manage to jump a good eight to ten feet). If your garden is small however and surrounded by many jumping-off points then you might have to forgo this placement fact and invest in a squirrel baffle.

If there are cats in your area, and believe me there are almost always cats anywhere you go, then you'll have to make sure that they won't have easy access to your feeders since the birds might not have a chance to fly to safety before they pounce. Try not to place your feeders within the reach of easy launching points for the cats, and also stay away from low lying shrubbery right next to your feeders as this gives them a good place to lay in wait.

A good idea is to have enough plant cover around your yard that the birds will feel safe enough to come freely and dine, even if you suffer from cats. This is also necessary to protect them from predator birds who will swoop down on any unsuspecting bird feeding at your tray. Plant cover affords the birds the chance to make a quick get-away.

Birds are also quite messy eaters and you should keep this in mind when placing your feeder. If you're not too fond of a constant mess then place the feeder slightly away from your house to give them room to be messy. Any discarded seed might also germinate, populating your lawn with odd plants and such that you never expected so either sterilize them first or clear away discarded seeds within a short period of time.

Since one of the main reasons you set up a feeding station is to be able to observe the birds as they feed, try and place your feeder in line with a window, or wherever you can be comfortable whilst watching your feeder, is the best place. I've placed mine in line with my kitchen window since I love watching the birds feed whilst I'm pottering about the kitchen. (After bird watching, cooking is my next best favorite hobby.)

I've also stationed a feeder tray near my living room so that I can watch with my feet comfortably up. This one is placed quite close to the living room window to stop the birds from colliding into it. (See the section "Window collisions" for more detail.) It took a bit longer for this feeder to establish itself but since it's gotten off the ground it's a never ending source of pleasure for me to curl up on my couch with a hot coffee and watch the antics of the birds as they feed.





What to use as bird food

This is a common enough question amongst many first time bird feeders and should be given due consideration. The fact is that birds will eat most anything and as long as it's healthy for them and non-toxic there's no harm in this. You'll find out pretty soon anyway that what a bird doesn't like eating it'll throw away before foraging around for something more palatable.

Whatever you place on your feeders therefore depends entirely upon what type of birds you want to draw to your feeder. Most birds will enjoy bird seed and won't be too fussed about it, but some birds strongly prefer mealworms, or fruit. Some, like hummers prefer nectar as their food of choice although insects are an enjoyable close second.

Your basic bird food menus

Bird seed mixes

Store bought bird seed mixes can be palatable to birds but be warned that if you're going in for the inexpensive varieties, these may contain seeds that birds won't eat. So while it may seem like you're saving on buying these cheaper mixes you might end up spending more than you thought since the birds go through these faster as they end up discarding most of the seeds they don't like. And while some of these discarded seeds are picked up by ground feeding birds quite a few just lay where they are ignored for the most part until you clean it away.

One thing to look for when you're buying any seed mix is to see whether it contains the all time favorite of birds, black oil sunflower seeds. These or the slightly larger striped sunflower seed that's also used by us as snacks is completely acceptable by most birds.

The more expensive the brand however, the more you're likely to get bird seed mixes that are more palatable your birds. There might still be some few undesirable seeds mixed in with these as well but for the most these will become fewer and far between the higher you go up the expense ladder.

The best bird seed mix that I can recommend to you though is the one that you mix yourself. There's nothing like it and you'll know that you're only including the seeds that are most eaten by the birds visiting your garden. For a first time bird feeding effort though I'd stick with the generic bird seed mixes at least to begin with, then as time goes along you'll be better able to make the correct choice regarding which seeds to buy depending on which birds visit your garden.





Seeds

Buying your seeds separately ensures that you have greater control over what goes in your feeders and also enables you to make your own mixes. Since I prefer this method I make all my seed mixes this way and keep my birds happy. For a small overview of what seeds are most used and preferred by birds go down to the next section called "Seeds". This coupled with the information you'll find in the section "Which seeds for which birds" will help you get a head start on making your own mixes.

Some seeds are just natural favorites and you should consider giving these seeds on their own and not in mixes. Some like peanuts even have their own feeders making it easier for you to separate out your birds from your feeders. Most seeds are relatively inexpensive but some like Nyjer are more expensive and are worth buying only in small bags so as to save them from spoiling.

This is another thing that you should be careful of when buying seeds, checking whether they're spoilt or not. Stay away from opened bags of seed, and bags placed in moisture filled areas. These seeds are more likely to rot faster if they haven't already. After you bring them home seed bags should be stored in a cool dry place to keep for a longer period.

Suet

Basically suet is beef fat and is readily available from your butchers. Suet is also a firm favorite of many birds and has its own suet feeders as well. Suet can be served in many forms but is most often mixed with bird seed to make an even more appetizing meal for the birds. I've included a few easy suet recipes in the "Bird feed recipes" section, but if you hunt around some more you should be able to find many other recipes that deal with suet.

Most suet mix recipes use peanut butter and bird seed and are most favored by many birds. If you don't feel like making any of the recipes yourself you can always find them ready made in the same stores that you buy your seed from. You and your birds will become entranced by such delicacies as suet balls, suet cakes and even suet pudding. Anything to do with suet you'll probably find in your pet store as suet is such a firm favorite of the birds.

Fruits

With experience you'll find that many birds also have a preference for fruits. This can be easily accommodated and will sometimes bring unexpected visitors to your garden as well. A good example is orioles. These birds love oranges and if you halve one and stick it on a convenient twig or branch you'll find that your garden is visited by orioles.





Hummingbirds can be enticed into your garden by a sliced up banana as well as by nectar.

Fruits, such as apples cut into bird sized pieces, along with strawberries are a good choice as are grapes. Berries of most any kind are a favorite of birds and will go down well on their menus. Sprinkling a little sugar onto tart fruits can also help but don't overdo it, keep a light hand on the sugar shaker.

During the heat of the summer months be sure to clean out any left over fruits as they will spoil quickly, replacing them with fresh ones every time.

Nectar

A great way to attract hummers and orioles is with nectar. Of course this is also a good way to attract bees, wasps and ants to your garden as well, but if you invest in an ant and bee guard you should be okay.

The nectar can consist of orange juice or even sugared water that you can make yourself with a minimum of fuss. Just mix 4 parts of boiling water with 1 part of sugar, storing the excess in the refrigerator up to a maximum of two days for further use.

Just remember that to attract hummers to your nectar, your feeder should either be placed close to red flowering plants or it should be painted a bright red to attract their attention. For orioles orange is their color of choice and make sure to color the feeder orange or station it next to orange flowers.

Also remember that although some people might recommend it to you, never ever color your nectar with a colored dye. This can prove harmful to the birds in the long run and should really be avoided.

Mealworms

You might not realize it but mealworms are a favorite delicacy of many birds and are readily available at most feed stores. These little worms are high in fat and protein content and are great for winter feeding times, and protein is also an essential part of bird diets. Mostly birds will get their protein from bugs and worms they catch themselves but if the ground is hard in the summer due to lack of rain, or it freezes over in the winter time, then birds will be unable to get through to their ready sources of protein.

In this case bird seed alone won't be enough to complement their diet. If you can handle the thought of live worms then the easiest way to provide this nourishment is by offering it to them in their feeders. I personally can't





stomach the thought and leave it to the many other bird feeders around to supply them with their proteins.

The mealworms when you buy them should be alive and kept in containers with tight fitting lids. They can be stored up to two to three weeks at room temperature. If you want to store them for longer then keep them in the warmest part of your fridge.

Grit

This is definitely one of things that almost no one but an ardent birder will think to supply at their bird feeding stations. By swallowing grit birds use it to help in their digestion processes. Since they have no teeth, grit is their natural solution to breaking up their foods.

If you've noticed a flock of birds converging onto the roads in winter time after the roads have just been covered by grit and ever wondered why, now you know. The coarse sand is very attractive to them and this is one of the easiest ways for them to get it. Something along the lines of squirrels and free food! Free food! All those birds are probably thinking free grit! Free grit!

If you're thinking of putting grit out for the birds as an additional lure or treat don't mix it in with the bird seed. By putting it separately the birds can ingest the amount they need and not the amount that you provide them with. Also since they have no need to take the grit at every meal adding it to the seed would only insure that they have too much.

You can place either regular coarse sand or oyster grit, which is ground oyster shells, on a separate feeder or tray for the birds to enjoy. Alternately you can use ground egg shells or small pebbles. Most of these types of grit can be purchased along with your other bird feed and at the same time.

For egg shell grit however, you'll need to sterilize it thoroughly before you offer it, so boil the shells for ten minutes first. Allow it to cool off and crush into small sized pieces. If they're about the rough size of sunflower seeds then you're on the right track.

Water

Next to grit water is one of the most overlooked things by bird feeders. Birds need to water to keep clean and also to keep healthy since it helps them maintain their feathers in proper working order.

For a more detailed description you can go to the section entitled "Water" where I've covered the important aspects of having water nearby, and also how to go about it.





What not to feed birds

Along with knowing what to give birds on your new feeder, you'll also need to know what not to give them as well. This knowledge will help to keep your birds happy and healthy, and to keep them coming back to your feeder time after time.

Chocolates

Chocolates and any food that contains chocolates are a huge no-no. A certain ingredient called theobromine in the chocolate is as toxic to birds as much as it is to dogs and cats. So even though you might think you're giving them a treat you're not. If you want to treat the birds then try giving them whole peanuts or some other such delicacy that they'll go wild over.

Old seeds or mixes

Old seeds or seed mixes are best thrown away since they could contain mold or mildew that you're unaware of. They could even be harboring an unhealthy amount of germs and parasites that could spread disease amongst the birds, so don't use it.

If you've bought a big bag of seeds, store it in a cool dry place for it to last longer, but any seed or mix that you're unsure about should be discarded immediately.

Desiccated coconut

Although fresh coconut is a good and healthy food for the birds to enjoy and one which they like, desiccated coconut is bad for them. When they eat the desiccated coconut it swells in their stomachs making them feel full. This can be especially dangerous during winter time when birds need to store up on the all the energy they can get.

By all means keep out fresh coconut for them to have but leave the desiccated coconut out of their diets.

Seeds with pesticides

Seeds which have been sprayed with pesticides are bad for all animals. So don't give them anything that you think might contain pesticides as this could prove fatal to them.

Nectar with colored dyes

When preparing or even buying nectar for use in hummingbird or oriole feeders, make sure that there's no coloring in it. These dyes can be harmful





to the small birds and shouldn't be used at all. If you want the color to attract the birds then either paint the outside of the feeder itself or place it in a colorful patch of flowers.

Which seeds for which birds

Here I've attempted to list what types of birds prefer what types of seeds. This is by no means an entirely accurate list, but has been compiled through information that I've gathered over the years through my own experiences and through the experiences of other birders whom I consider to be close friends of mine.

I've made the list by seed variety rather than bird variety to make it easier since there are less seed varieties than there are bird varieties.

Sunflower

- Goldfinches, Cardinals, Sparrows,
- Grosbeaks, Blue Jays, Blackbirds,
- Woodpeckers, Titmice, Chickadees,
- Nuthatches, Doves, Indigo Buntings,
- Juncos, Mockingbirds, Painted Buntings,
- Purple Finches, House Sparrows

Black Oil Sunflower Seeds

- Grosbeaks, Blue Jays, Goldfinches,
- Cardinals, Blackbirds, Nuthatches,
- Juncos, Purple Finches, Titmice,
- Woodpeckers, Chickadees, Mockingbirds,
- Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Crossbills,
- White-throated Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows

Safflower

- Blue Jays, Doves, Purple Finches,
- Juncos, Cardinals, Sparrows,
- Nuthatches, Grosbeaks, Titmice

Corn

- Blue Jays, Pigeons, House Sparrows,
- Blackbirds, Cardinals, Doves, Juncos,
- Woodpeckers, Meadowlarks, Starlings,
- Grackles, White-throated Sparrows,
- Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasants





Millet

- Indigo Buntings, Painted Buntings, Doves,
- Juncos, Meadowlarks, Grosbeaks,
- House Sparrows, Blackbirds, Pigeons,
- Cardinals, Purple Finches, Towhees,
- Chipping Sparrows, Tree Sparrows,
- Cowbirds, White-throated Sparrows,
- White-crowned Sparrows, Goldfinches

Nyjer

- Goldfinches, Pine Siskins, Purple Finches,
- Doves, Chickadees, Juncos, Painted Buntings,
- Pigeons, Indigo Buntings, Song Sparrows,
- White-throated Sparrows, Redpolls,
- House Finches, Dark-eyed Juncos

Peanuts

- Blue Jays, Cardinals, Juncos,
- Mockingbirds, Goldfinches, Purple Finches,
- Nuthatches, Red Winged Blackbirds,
- Grackles, Titmice, Mourning Doves,
- Chickadees, House Finches, Starlings,
- White-throated Sparrows, Woodpeckers, Robins

Milo

- Blue Jay, Pigeon, Dove

Seeds

Although this isn't a comprehensive guide to all the seeds varieties that are available for birds I hope that it is somewhat thorough enough that you get the information that you need from it.

To prevent seeds from germinating in your garden place a pound of them between two paper towels and microwave them on high for three minutes to sterilize them.

- Sunflower
- Black Oil Sunflower
- Safflower
- Corn
- Millet





- Proso Millet
- Nyjer
- Peanuts

Sunflower

Sunflower unlike most other seed varieties hold a singularly universal appeal that spans across species, with birds and squirrels as well as certain other mammals drawn to it. Humans can also count themselves amongst the mammal species who like sunflower seeds. There is more than one variety of sunflower seed to be had, just as there is more than one Sunflower variety to be found.

One of these is the Striped Sunflower seed. This seed is better suited for birds with large bills that are capable of getting through the shells to the meat inside since these seeds are large with thick shelled. Many birds are drawn to these seeds probably for their high oil content, as well proteins, carbohydrates and fats.

The use of striped sunflower seeds to distract large birds, and even squirrels is a well known one and has been in use for sometime now. This will in turn enable you to provide the smaller birds with their own feeding platforms. Striped sunflower seeds can also be found frequently in bird seed mixes.

Black Oil Sunflower

This variety of sunflower seed is one of the most common to be found in feeders across North America due to the fact that most birds will eat the black oil sunflower seed over any other type of seed if given the choice. Such is the popularity of the black oil sunflower seed amongst birds that there are only two varieties of birds who don't eat the seeds: tree sparrows and starlings.

Black oil sunflower seeds have a thin shell and are high in fat giving an almost instant energy boost to any bird who eats this seed. This is especially good for birds in winter time when large amounts of energy are required by birds to survive. The black oil seeds are also high in proteins, and fibers along with vitamin E and other such nutrients and minerals.

The best of these black oil sunflower kernels however go into the commercial production of sunflower oil used for cooking purposes and only a very few of these really good ones end up for the birds to feed upon.

However you'll find that a stash of these along with the striped sunflower seed variety will be sufficient enough to lure away any squirrels from your bird feeders.





Safflower

Safflower is a commercially produced seed that looks like a white sunflower seed. However birds aren't fooled by this, and although some birds will like safflower seeds many birds prefer the black oil sunflower seeds over the safflower seeds.

Safflower seeds are however, just as high in fat and protein as sunflower seeds, but they have a bitter taste. This doesn't enamor itself to squirrels but chipmunks have been found to like these seeds. So if you live in an area where chipmunks are a problem luring them away from your bird feeders with safflower seeds is an excellent idea.

Another plus of safflower seeds are that large birds, like starlings and grackles, don't like them and will stay away from your feeders. Cardinals on the other hand love the safflower seed and if you want to attract more cardinals to your garden, then the safflower seeds is the way to go.

Many high end seed mixes also incorporate safflower in their mixtures, whereas you won't find safflower in the cheaper seed mixes. This is because comparatively, safflower is a more expensive seed than some of the other seed varieties available.

Corn

Corn or cracked corn is a firm favorite of many birds and is another seed that is high in fats and proteins. Cracked corn however is vulnerable to rot and mildew and should be inspected thoroughly in your feeders if left outside for any length of time. Fine, cracked corn should be avoided as it might also turn to mush but go ahead and add the coarse variety to your seed mixes.

Corn cobs on the other hand are easier to handle as the chances for rot are less and it also seems to disappear faster. For maximum delight of birds and even squirrels place a fresh corn cob that's been carefully peeled of the husk and silk onto your feeder and watch as the feasting takes place.

Millet

Millet can generally be found in many inexpensive seed mixes and although not a firm favorite of many birds, juncos and sparrows are quite happy eating any discarded seeds off the ground. Millet can be found for bird mixes in two different varieties, red millet and white millet.

Red millet is most commonly to be found in bird mixes and is also sometimes used as a cheap alternative to Nyjer. The seed is relatively small





but is preferred by some birds like sparrows. White millet is also preferred by sparrows as well as doves and juncos.

Millet is also a favorite of many ground feeding birds, and its hard shell protects it from the elements making it a favorite choice if you want to just spread the seed on the ground where your ground feeding birds will have a feast.

Proso Millet

Proso Millet unlike normal millet is of a better quality and is mostly used in bird seed mixes of better quality. Like the normal millet however, proso millet can also be divided into two types, the red proso millet variety, and the white proso millet variety.

This proso type of millet is a grass seed and is similar to the normal variety. The red proso variety is twice as large as the normal red millet variety, but like the normal millet is a firm favorite of ground feeding birds. The red proso can also be exchanged with the white proso variety with out any difficulty as the birds won't make a fuss.

Both varieties of proso millet are expensive and difficult to obtain. Of these, the white is the easier to find in stores although it's still scarce. The red proso variety is almost impossible to find and if you find some I'd suggest you buy a bag immediately, you might not find it again for some time.

The red proso is however slightly higher in price than the white proso, so isn't used as extensively in bird seed as the normal and white proso varieties. The red proso also tends to get confused with the milo seed which is also small and red.

If you want to attract either Painted or Indigo Buntings, or even Tanagers, to your garden then putting out some white proso millet will be a sure fire guarantee for this since these songbird varieties just adore this seed. And if you throw a handful of white proso millet onto your feeders you might be surprised at the outcome as most birds will readily eat this seed if their first seed of choice isn't available.

Nyjer

Nyjer, or Niger as it's sometimes called, is often mistaken for the Thistle seed. The difference lies more in the fact that thistle is a weed whereas Nyjer isn't and is cultivated in parts of Africa and Asia and imported here instead. Since Nyjer isn't native to Northern America the cultivation of Nyjer is frowned upon since it grows just as fast as its counterpart, thistle and can readily overtake the natively growing flora. If this happens disaster





is bound to happen as the balance of nature will become upset and all sorts of things could happen.

This might sound a bit dire and doom-and-gloom but it is unfortunately true. The impact of such an introduction could bring about change on the scale that the introduction of hares into the Australian landscape some hundred years ago did. It's sad to say that the Australian landscape will never be the same again and all due to one small, unthinking mistake.

Don't worry though, all shipments of the Nyjer seed are first heat treated to prevent germination. Nature being nature though you might find that one or two hardy Nyjer seeds have survived to grow from amongst the many discarded seeds from your Nyjer feeder.

So if you find a yellow daisy-like flowering plant within the near vicinity of your feeder go on the side of caution and remove it entirely. Remember that Nyjer grows like a weed even if it isn't one and if you're not too careful you could find your garden overtaken by Nyjer plants before you realize it!

Nyjer seeds are black and very small, and are supposed to be high in calories and oil content, which accounts for the partiality of many wild birds for this seed. However Nyjer seeds are more expensive than normal birdseed and I believe that this is in part due to the fact of importation costs along with the sterilization costs. You could buy Nyjer seeds in a mixed bag as well, but my personal preference is to buy them separately as I feel I get more value for money.

Nyjer seeds are best used along with a Nyjer feeder since this minimizes wastage of the seed and also ensures that the birds that you intend the seeds for do actually get it without having to compete with the larger birds.

If you place Nyjer seeds in your garden you'll find that you're attracting more wild birds than ever as, like I said earlier, they tend to favor the tiny black seeds. So you'll find that you're getting more Goldfinches as well as house finches and purple finches along with pine siskins and redpolls. Other birds such as juncos and sparrows are also drawn to the Nyjer seed along with doves and chickadees. Since these birds are mainly ground feeders however and can't feed from the purpose built Nyjer feeders, you might want to consider adding some of the seeds to your normal feeding stations as well.

Peanuts

These are probably the number one preferred food for squirrels so you might be wondering why you're offering it in your bird feeders and giving the squirrels a free for all chance to raid them. There are reasons and don't





worry these are good ones too. For one thing peanuts are high in proteins, oils and fats making them the perfect thing to feed birds especially in the winter time along with other high energy seeds like sunflower and safflower.

You'll also find that a number of the more acrobatically inclined birds are drawn to peanut offerings and will gobble them up at the drop of a hat. These birds include woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches amongst a host of others. The scrabbling that takes place by these birds to get at their peanuts are a sight to behold and more than make up for its pricier value.

Such has been the popularity of peanuts amongst bird feeders that a whole new type of feeder has sprung up just to accommodate these peanut eaters. Generally made of a wire mesh, the peanut feeders don't come equipped with perches and instead expect birds to cling to the wire whilst feeding. This in turn deters other, bigger birds who're unable to cling, from getting at the peanuts. Some might try however and this can lead to some interesting results.

Unprotected peanuts that get wet will grow mold fairly quickly and should be checked frequently to make sure the nuts are still safe for consumption. Another use of peanuts comes in the form of peanut butter, and this is a firm favorite of not only the human population but also of the bird population. I, myself, use peanut butter mixtures as suet feeders for my birds and find that they disappear with reassuring regularity.

For a treat try placing whole peanuts in your bird feeders. Before too long you'll find your feeder overrun by a flock of happy birds (and I mean a flock). They'll all be happily cracking at the shells to get at the meat inside feeling quite content with the world around them. Woe betide you however if you get them used to this treat and forget to place it outside. A veritable choir of screeching birds will greet you the minute you set foot outside your door.

Milo

Milo is not one of the favored seeds of most birds but it is consistently one of the favored seeds of inexpensive seed mixtures. This paradox probably accounts for the sight that might greet your eyes of the many birds who sift through their feed first, throwing away anything that displeases them with a twitch of their beaks.

Milo seeds are sometimes confused with red proso millet seed, but don't be fooled as the red proso millet is quite expensive and difficult to obtain.





Water

When you're buying your new feeder you might want to consider buying a bird bath or water trough to go along with it. For hungry birds water is as much a necessity for survival as food is. Besides needing it for quenching their thirst birds also need to water for bathing as it helps keep their feathers in prime condition by keeping the natural water proofing intact. What many people don't realize is that birds need water as much as we do.

Keeping a trough or bird bath near your feeder is also a good way to attract birds to your garden as well. Birds will be drawn like bees to honey when they spy the water and will, amongst other things, provide you with hours of entertaining bird watching.

Perhaps an attachable water trough can stay on the side of your feeder or better still a separate perch for the trough so that messy eating issues don't cloud up the water. If you're going in for a separate one then you might want to look into getting a bird bath instead. You can have the best of both worlds since there'll be enough room for the birds to bathe in here as well.

This should also help with the overcrowding problem of bird feeders as some birds might go on to the bird baths instead of the feeders. Setting up the bath either next to convenient shrubbery or with a separate perching stand will also add to its allure as birds will have a place to perch before and after their bathing sessions. Shrubbery will also give birds extra cover if predators are nearby.

Something else that I've noticed is that some birds are quite polite and will wait their turn whilst there are other birds in the bath. Or this could simply be the pecking order, where the thug-like birds of the bird world will intimidate the lesser fierce birds into minding their P's and Q's.

Of course during certain seasons you might find that your bird bath has been entirely overtaken along with your feeder by many flocking birds. This in turn will prevent more from having access to the water supply.

An alternate remedy could be to keep an extra water trough or two on hand to be used for these especially busy times. If this is the case placing the temporary water troughs some distance away from the feeder might solve your problem to some extent. You could also just use old discarded receptacles for the troughs so you won't need to spend extra on the temporary troughs.

Another attractive benefit of the water trough or bath is that you'll also attract squirrels and other such animals who also go in search of a ready





supply of water. I don't mind this so much since they're not actually stealing away my water, besides which their antics are definitely a sight to behold.

Most people will recommend that you clean your trough or bath at least once a week but I take this one step further and like to give these a good scrubbing at least once in two days, refilling it with fresh water every time.

This is something that I enjoy doing just as much as I enjoy putting out the bird seed almost daily. The decision therefore is personal preference, although I would recommend cleaning it at least once a week in the hot summer months as bacteria tends to accumulate much faster, as does algae.

Keeping the trough or bath in the shade during summer can help slow down the spread of algae. Also keep in mind that all the same rules for placing a feeder apply in the placement of your bird bath as well. You really wouldn't want an unsuspecting bird to be pounced on by a cat.

In the winter time keeping your bird bath going becomes slightly more difficult especially if you live in the colder northern climes where the water is sure to freeze over before you can say "Boo!" To overcome these problems there are a few simple steps you can take.

The easiest is keeping your bird bath close to the ground as this only allows heat to escape from the top and not from the bottom as well. Keeping it grounded will also help to protect it from the buffeting cold winds that would otherwise suck the heat right out of it.

You could of course pour a kettle or two of boiling water over the frozen water to melt it but there's a good chance that you'd need to be out there constantly to achieve anything. This just isn't acceptable for most people as the last thing you'll want to be doing is to trudge through snow and ice to defrost a bird bath that would only just freeze over the minute your back's turned. I've resorted therefore to investing in a bird bath heater.

The one I've got only heats the water up enough for there to be a constant pool of running water in parts of the bath, the other parts are frozen but this doesn't really present that much of a problem. I've plugged mine into an outdoor electrical outlet and have invested in a heavily grounded extension cord as well. The heater is perfectly safe and fits snugly into my bird bath without any hassle.

Your other option is to get a bird bath with a built-in heater. These also work wonderfully well and should continue working even when the temperature drops to minus twenty degrees Fahrenheit. If neither of these appeals to you then placing a piece of thick Styrofoam on top of the water will also insulate the bath and help to keep it from freezing over.





Get your kids involved

Bird feeding is a great way to get your kids involved with nature, and will also help to get them interested in the world around them as well. I started at a fairly young age and was introduced to the many pleasures of birding by my grandfather who helped me build my first bird feeder – the infamous paint-can lid feeder. Taking my cue from that, I've also introduced my various nephews and nieces into the joys of birding by first starting them off with the simple step of bird feeding.

Although the younger kids show more interest in the actual goings on involved in the feeding process, the older ones show refreshing enthusiasm when it comes time to fill the feeders. They even show reluctant interest over the new bird feeders that I make it a point to build with the younger kids.

When it comes to identifying the various birds we see at the feeders however everyone joins in, even the grown-ups if they're there! Generally we have a marvelous time flipping through the many bird guides that I've somehow accumulated through the years, to find the correct birds.

Binoculars also play a large part in these gatherings since the kids like to play with them and they just make it easier to identify the birds. This could've led to many a bitter battle between the children over who gets the binoculars but happily I've also collected just as many binoculars over the years as I have bird guides, so the problem was averted.

If you're still in doubt as to whether you can get your kids successfully involved in all things bird you won't be any more when I tell you that a friend of mine who just happens to be a second grade teacher has also managed to get her kids interested in the subject of bird feeding. The kids, she says, are wonderfully interested in making their own bird feeders and since this doesn't involve anything more strenuous than cutting a little bit here, and fixing a little bit there, using only the most basic of household items everyone's happy.

Don't however think that this is the magic cure-all to drag your kids away from the computer screen or TV even, because it's not. In this day and age of instant gratification most kids prefer hanging out in their rooms playing computer games to hanging out with real people. That's why I decided to start early on with my nieces and nephews. At that early age they're more open to new ideas and suggestions and are even positively willing to leave behind their games.

So to that end, just below I've gone into some detail on a few build-it-yourself bird feeders which the kids can help with as well. Most are





relatively inexpensive and are fun to build. Beyond that section I've also included a section on easy bird feed recipes that you can again involve the kids in, with only a minimum of fuss involved.

Building your own birdfeeder

Building your own bird feeder can be fun, and it's also a relaxing way to spend the time with your kids. The feeders range from very easy-to-build, to slightly difficult. The easy ones are, well, easy and mostly use common household items. These ones are probably the best ones to involve the younger kids in, but older kids will probably enjoy the more challenging feeders. Both types of feeders work equally well and are fun to build.

Platform Feeders

For this you'll need either an old pie tin, baking sheet, or even a paint-can lid that's been thoroughly cleaned. Anything that's flat and fairly large should do for this endeavor.

Place this most basic of feeders either on an old stool or tree stump and fill with feed, and remember to empty out accumulated water over time. You could even nail it on to a suitable post but if you're doing that make sure to punch enough drainage holes so that water won't gather in your tray.

Finch Feeder

Use an old plastic soda bottle. Find a sturdy twig and push it through the bottle until it comes out on the other side. This is a perch for the finches to use while feeding so make sure that you've left enough clearance on either side for them to grip on to.

If the bottle is a large one then you can add more than one perching twig. If you're adding more than one twig then place the successive ones perpendicular to each other so that as you go down the bottle your perches are at right angles to each other. This will give the birds more space for themselves.

Poke a few more holes above where you've placed the perches for the birds to be able to get at the seed easily. Tie a sturdy string around the bottle neck and hang it on a handy tree branch or pole.

Sunflower Seed Feeder

Use the same directions as you would for the Finch Feeder to make your sunflower feeder as well. The only difference is to make the feeding port





holes big enough for the sunflower seeds to come through as the birds feed.

Pine Cone Suet Feeder

The easiest suet feeder that you're going to come across is this. Find a pine cone and roll it first in peanut butter, and then in birdseed, and hang from the nearest tree branch!

Easy Suet Feeder

Another easy suet feeder comes in the form of the mesh bags that onions come in. Simply place the suet in the bag and tie the top very tightly before hanging.

Oriole Orange Feeder

For the simplest oriole feeder just stick an orange halve onto a convenient twig. Or get a small disposable cup which you can stick on the twig and place some grape jelly inside. Some orioles love grape jelly. If you paint the cup a bright orange this will be even better since orioles are attracted to that color.

Oriole Nectar Feeder

Another easy oriole feeder is the nectar feeder. Use a small jar such as an empty baby food jar and fill it with orange juice or homemade nectar (recipe to be found in the next section "easy bird feed recipes"), and tie it with a string around its neck and hang from a tree. The orioles will use the rim of the jar as their perch.

Milk Carton Feeder

Use a small 1 pint milk carton or the ones that you get in schools, and wash it thoroughly. Staple the top opening closed, making sure the staples are fully closed and won't be able to hurt the birds. Cut out a small section from the body of the carton leaving enough room on the top and the bottom so the carton remains stable.

If you want, paint the carton in pleasing shades perhaps even in bright colors to attract the birds. Let the paint dry and punch a hole through the top. Run a piece of yarn or string through this and hang on a tree branch. Fill the feeder with seed and watch as birds flock to your garden.

Since this is an inexpensive feeder it's easy to build over and over again without any hassle and takes away the requirement for regular cleaning since it will deteriorate fast enough.





Coconut Feeder

Birds love fresh coconut so this is a surefire winner. Halve and drain the coconut and hang from a convenient tree limb. To hang you can either use a small bracket, or perhaps even just place it on a patio stool or table. Placing the coconut half on the ground also works.

After the shell has been cleaned out (and it will be) you can then even use it as a fat or suet feeder. Punch a hole through the now empty shell and hang on a branch with a piece of string. Nothing could be simpler.

Easy Orange Feeder

Cut a large orange or grapefruit in half and scoop out the pulp. Leave the thick peel intact while you're doing this as this will be our feeder. Slather a generous amount of peanut butter all around the inside of the cleaned-out orange half.

Next punch two holes, one directly across from the other in the top, open part, of the orange half. Run a string or wire through the holes. Fill the halved orange peel with birdseed or even the cleaned out pulp itself, and hang on a branch or post using the string or wire.

Hummingbird Feeder

To create this homemade hummingbird feeder you'll need a plastic bottle.

Using a pin or small nail create a small pin sized hole near the base of the bottle. Three equally spaced holes will work just as well. Paint these "feeding ports" in a bright red color to attract the hummingbirds, using a non-toxic paint so as not to harm the birds.

Fill the bottle with the nectar solution and hang up somewhere the hummingbirds will be attracted to it. To hang your feeder, tie a string or wire firmly around the closed bottle lid.

Although the nectar might drip for a little while, it will eventually stop as the pressure lowers enough and creates a vacuum inside the bottle that will hold the nectar.

Coffee Can Feeder

Use an old coffee can for this with a plastic lid and make sure that it's washed properly. Cut three evenly spaced holes near the bottom of the can with a can opener. Punch another two holes, this time at the top of the can to run your string or wire through. This will be how you hang it.





Attach a plastic plant saucer that's larger than the coffee can to the bottom. You can use a nut and bolt to do this if it's more convenient. I just nail it together, with the nails coming up through the bottom of the can, and bend them slightly inside the can to get a good grip on it. I then cover them with a suitable tape so that any rust won't get mixed up with the seeds.

Fill the can with bird seed, close the plastic lid, and hang outside. The plastic plant dish will act as a suitable perch for the birds.

Suet Log Feeder

Cut a branch that's fairly straight with a thickness of about 3-8 inches and a length of about 15-20 inches. Perches aren't necessary as the wood provides enough of a grip for the birds to utilize.

Drill holes large enough to hold the suet throughout the length of the log. Ideally holes should be about 1 inch in diameter. Next screw in a large eyebolt into one end of the log, this will be used to hang the log on to a tree branch using heavy gauge wire, a sturdy rope, or a chain.

Stuff the suet into the holes before hanging the log feeder up. If you do want perches then drill additional smaller holes near the feeding holes and glue small wooden perches into it.

Simple Ground Feeder

Just as for the platform feeder get an old cookie sheet or some such platform for your feeder tray. Find four lengths of 6-8 inch pieces of wood that you can use to make the legs and either drill and fix the legs to resemble a normal table; or create two "A" frames from the four pieces of wood by making a two sided triangle and drill or nail to the tray.

If you want to get a more elaborate feeder then add a roof. Simply build a second feeder and attach to the top of the first feeder to fix as a roof.

Bird feed recipes

Here is a list of easy to make bird feed recipes that you can do at home and involve your kids as well.

Bread Suet recipe

Take a slice of bread, punch a hole in the top and thread a piece of yarn through it (string will cut through the bread). Leave the bread out to dry for a day and slather one side with peanut butter. Fill a plate with bird seed and place the peanut buttered side of the bread on to it. When you lift it





the bird seed should be spread generously over the side of bread. Repeat for the reverse side of bread and hang out side.

Suet Balls

- 1 lb ground suet
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1/2 lb oatmeal
- 1/8 cup bacon grease
- Molasses
- Seeds such as sunflower and safflower

Melt the suet and add all the ingredients, leaving extra seeds for later usage. Roll into mediums sized balls and liberally coat with the extra seeds.

Bird Cake

- 1 lb self raising flour
- 1/4 lb margarine
- A little sugar
- Bird seeds

Mix all the ingredients together and bake as you would a rock cake.

Hummingbird Nectar

- 4 parts boiling water
- 1 part sugar

Mix sugar and water together well, and leave to cool before filling your feeder. Extra nectar can be stored up to two days in your fridge.

Rice Recipe

- 1 part cooked and hulled millet
- 1 part cooked white rice
- 1 part cooked brown rice
- 1/2 part bird seed such as sunflower

Mix all the ingredients together, and fill your feeder. (Millet should be soaked prior to cooking)

Fruit Cocktail

- 2 peeled oranges
- 1 banana cut into small pieces





- 1 apple cut into small pieces
- A handful of strawberries halved or quartered
- A handful of blueberries
- A bunch of seedless grapes
- A little bit of sugar

Toss all the fruits and the sugar together, and place on your feeder.

Fruit Suet

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup suet
- Blueberries
- Raisins
- Quartered strawberries
- 1 Orange cut into small pieces (this might be slightly tricky)
- A handful of nuts
- Some cornmeal

Mix everything together and place in a suet feeder.

Rendered Fat Cakes

Get some fat from your butcher and render it until it is crisp. Break it up and throw into a large mixing bowl with cornmeal, peanut butter, bird seed, and anything else that might appeal to your birds. Mix together well, before forming into balls.

Lard and Peanut Butter Suet

- 1 part peanut butter
- 1/2 part lard
- 1/2 part suet
- 1 part flour
- 2 parts of cornmeal
- 2 parts of oatmeal

Melt lard and peanut butter, and add suet. Mix in rest of the ingredients until it seems reasonably firm like a dough mixture. Form into balls and either freeze or serve immediately.

Oriole Ambrosia

- 1 part water
- 1 part Grape Jelly





Mix the water and the grape jelly until it resembles a thick juice. Use the blender if you think it necessary to obtain the right consistency, and using a funnel pour into your Oriole feeder.

Bird Feeder Shish Kebabs

- Skewers (metal or wooden)
- Fruit – cut up into bird-sized pieces
- Vegetables – also cut up into bird sized pieces
- Small Suet balls or cakes

Skewer the fruits and the vegetable pieces alternately and hang up in a convenient place. Add the suet balls or cakes only if it is winter as otherwise these might melt. When hanging or placing the skewers, make sure there aren't any points on which the birds can harm themselves.

Identifying birds

As I was saying earlier, identifying the various birds that come into your yard is part of the fun of bird feeding and this can also be another great way to get your kids involved as well. You won't need much but you will need a bird guide or a field guide that lists the types and varieties of birds, preferably the ones in your area. If you're living on a migration path then you can expand your guide to include these as well.

It might also be helpful if you own a pair of binoculars but don't worry too much if you don't. It's not entirely necessary for identifying the various birds, especially in the beginning, and if all you want to do is to have fun with your kids. However, if you're getting serious about birding you might want to explore the different types of binoculars that are available to you and which ones are best used in the pursuits of birding.

The field guide however is a must as otherwise you'll only be able to give your own names to the birds – which can in itself be fun. I prefer using my well-thumbed bird field guide myself but there are many new guides for you to choose from. You might even be able to find one or two at your library, this way you can see if you want to invest in a separate guide for yourself or not.

The other option is of course the internet. This is especially handy if you have a laptop so that you can bring your bird guide to you, rather than you going to the bird guide. Here again you'll find yourself spoiled for choice as there are many such sites dedicated to bird watching, but a little judicious research on your part should yield excellent results. It also helps, I've found, to do all of this earlier before getting the kids involved as this will save you





the cost of a headache brought about by childish fidgeting and sighs of impatience.

I've found that many a baby-sitting hour has sped by on feet of wings as we spent our time gainfully occupied trying to identify birds. Try it and you might be pleasantly surprised by the results you get.

Binoculars

If you do want to buy a pair of binoculars for your bird watching then I suggest you either talk with the people selling them and get some information or that you again resort to the internet to get some research on what you need.

On a side note, binoculars these days don't cost an arm and a leg like they used to, and for a mid-priced pair you can probably get all the features you'll need. If you're turning serious in your birding pursuits however, you might need to invest in something a little pricier that can serve you well over the years and through many hours of bird watching.

If it's only for a quick hour or so with the kids then something even less than the mid-ranged binoculars might be alright. It's really up to what you're going in for.

However here's a list of things that you might want to start with when investigating your new pair of binoculars.

It should be affordable

You need to feel comfortable when pressing them against your eyes

They should be able to resolve details and colors with accuracy

Focusing ability should be good

A lightweight and compact model is good if you're going to use it on bird watching treks where weight matters a lot

They need to be sturdy

There'll naturally be more things that you'll want to check out and in more detail when buying your binoculars but these should give you a place to start from.





Attracting birds

Right, you’ve got your bird feeder and you’ve followed all the rules and precautions for placing it but you still don’t have any birds coming to your feeder. What can you do about that? That’s where I come in. I can’t guarantee you that any of these methods will work but maybe some or all them might yield some results and will be able to draw a variety of birds to your garden.

Check List

First things first, have you checked whether you’re using the right kind of feeder? If you only have certain varieties of birds in your area you might need to use specialty bird feeders to attract them. As always a good case in point is for hummingbirds. Hummers are more likely to come to your garden if you have something that will entice them, so don’t expect to get hummingbirds with a ground feeder.

Next up, have you checked whether you’ve placed the correct bird feed to attract your birds? Suet won’t necessarily help you in getting Goldfinches to come to your garden as they prefer Nyjer seeds.

What You Can Do

Don’t despair though there are a number of things that you can do to make your garden more attractive to the birds in your area. And if all else fails you could always turn your bird feeder into a squirrel feeder, those little monsters are always hungry and are always on the look out for free handouts!

Food

If your goal is to attract as many birds as possible to your garden, then don’t be stingy. Supply your birds with more than one type of food. Alternately have many different feeders available with different types of food, sort of like a bird buffet.

Don’t limit yourself to only nectar, or seeds. A lot of birds enjoy fruits and berries along with nuts and seeds. Most birds will also eat insects (where do you think the term “the early bird catches the worm” came from?) so provide them with insect attracting plants, or mealworms. Additionally, plants that we call weeds might be rich in nutrients for some birds so think twice before digging them up.





Some birds will eat waste scraps of food and placing these out can also be of benefit to attracting them. If you're doing this however be careful as you might also attract unwanted rodents to your garden as well, besides squirrels.

Water

Water is very attractive to most birds and if you install a bird bath along with your feeder you're almost guaranteed to get some visitors to your garden. As I've mentioned in the section called "Water", most birds will be attracted to the tantalizing lure of a bath as this is a vital part of their lives and helps to keep their feathers in tip top shape. You'll find that as time goes by that the birds will be using the bird bath more for bathing purposes than even for drinking.

Keep the bath clean and filled with fresh water, as regularly as possible since an unclean bird bath not only promotes the spread of disease but will also keep the birds away.

If they're still not coming you might have to be a little patient and wait for a few weeks for the birds to notice this new feeding station. And this holds true if your area has an abundant supply of food, most birds won't be looking too hard for different grazing grounds. So, with a little time and patience mixed in with a little bit of careful planning and luck you should be able to attract birds to your new feeder.

Water misters are also a great way to attract birds, especially hummingbirds as they love to fly through the water mist to bathe.

Water troughs that provide drinking water can also be a good idea, and can be kept in shallow bowls or pans.

Plant Cover

Sometimes birds might not come to your feeder if there's not enough shrubbery or plant cover around. They might feel unsafe in such an open environment and might stay away from your garden altogether. So provide some shrubs or other foliage for your birds. These need not be extensive but there should be enough to draw the birds and make them feel safe from predators.

While you're doing this, planting trees that especially attract birds is a bonus but you'll need to do a little bit of research to get the right ones. I've mentioned a few varieties in the section "Trees and other shrubs".

Hummingbirds for instance like the color red and by planting flowering trees and shrubs which produce red flowers rich in nectar you're bound to





attract many little hummers. Make sure that the flowers are tubular in shape as well and you should be set. Hanging the feeders within the red flowering plants will also be a good way to get them to find your feeders.

Housing Accommodation

Placing bird houses or other such nesting options in your garden will also attract certain birds, and this will work more so if you catch the right season for this. Buying only bird houses however won't help as some birds like trees and shrubs to build their nests in, and others might use nesting shelves.

Cats

Try as far as possible to keep cats out of your garden. Most birds know what a cat in your garden means and will stay away on that basis alone. For more information on how to prevent or curtail this problem got to the section marked "Cats".

Most common garden birds

Here, I've listed the most common garden birds that can be found in northern America. This isn't to say that you'll find these birds visiting your garden, but there's a good chance that they will. And if you're aware of what type of birds to expect then you might be able to place specific food or such that will attract them to your garden.

- Blue Jay
- Northern Cardinal
- Mourning Dove
- Goldfinch
- House Finch
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Crow
- Tufted titmouse
- Chickadee
- Downy Woodpecker
- Grackle
- Sparrow
- Mockingbird
- Wren
- Hummingbird
- Oriole
- Pine Siskin
- Robin
- Starlings





- Redpolls
- Purple Finches
- Bluebirds
- Yellow Warbler
- Thrush
- Swallow
- Nuthatch





Discouraging large birds

Are large birds coming to your feeders and gobbling down everything without leaving anything behind for the smaller birds? Do you want to only attract small birds to your garden but have difficulty in keeping the larger ones away? Well, there are a few ways to deal with this problem, the simplest being to purchase a feeder that can only accommodate small birds. A tube feeder or hopper or gazebo feeder with space or perches enough only for small birds will do the trick as the larger ones won't be able to feed whilst hovering.

If all you want to attract are hummers or orioles then go for a specialty feeder, it's guaranteed that the larger birds won't be able to feed off these. There's also the choice of having a feeder with a counter balance. When larger birds land on the feeder or perches, the counter balance acts against them since their body weight is too much and the feeder ports will remain closed. However when the smaller birds alight the counterbalance acts accordingly and the ports stay open for them to be able to feed.

Then again you can always just provide two separate feeders, one that caters to the larger birds and one that caters solely to the smaller birds. This way everyone's kept happy and you feel good knowing that you've not turned any hungry birds away.

Something else that I found out quite by accident is that large birds also eat dry dog food. Don't worry, it's good for them and will cause them no harm. Since they eat more than the smaller birds do and since dog food is cheaper by far than bird feed it's also quite an economical way for you to feed them, just place some on a feeding platform for them to eat. It might take a little time for them to get used to this and you can help this process by placing tube feeders for your smaller birds and keeping the platform feeders solely for the larger ones, at least in the beginning.

Once they've gotten used to this and the change in meal plans you can slowly move the feeder over to another part of your garden from where your other feeders are located. Finally when they're settled in their new feeding grounds you can bring out another platform or hopper feeder for your small birds if you want.

You could also use a feeder with a cage around it as this will only allow access for small birds to go through. If you already have many feeders and don't want to buy another one you could always buy some wire mesh and wrap it around your existing feeders making sure that no sharp edges are protruding.





If you are getting many large birds flocking to your feeders however, remember that they're only coming there because they're hungry. This could imply that there's a shortage of food in the area and you're one of their best sources to find nourishment. So although large birds can be pesky at times and not leave any feed over for your smaller birds I'd suggest you think twice before excluding them from feeding in your garden. Food might be scarce and it's not nice to have to go hungry.





Baffles

Were you "baffled" on reading the title for this section? If you were don't worry and join the crowd. Many people who're buying bird feeders for the first time are certainly left scratching their heads when they hear of the large number of feeders they have to choose from. Throw in the word baffles and you're almost certainly left in the wake of your friendly sales person to whom all of this is old hat. You're left with crucial questions like "to baffle or not to baffle?" feeling quite off balance yourself.

What is a baffle though? Before we go any further let's just sit back and take a good look at what we're up against. A baffle is a device designed by an evil genius to, well, baffle certain undesirable creatures who also like your bird feeder and see it as a source of unending free food. In other words a baffle in most cases is also known as a squirrel (or raccoon) proof device.

Don't be fooled by this though. Most of these so-called squirrel proof devices aren't exactly squirrel proof. Contrary to all expectations and the inflated self opinion that mankind has about itself, most squirrels are fully able to outwit and out-manuever us with barely a blink of its tiny little eyes. Now, you might just take exception to this but I'm sorry to say that many a person has fought many a valiant fight against these little creatures and still come out the loser.

What I said in an earlier section still holds true here, "Where there's a will, there's a way", and in this case the squirrel's will is far greater and superior to that of ours. And rightly so in fact, for where we see the bird feeder only as a source of food for birds and perhaps as a means of entertainment for us, the squirrel sees it as a source of food for them.

Immediately a little light goes on in their brain telling them that here's food for them. So I ask you, who's going to come out the winner in this battle of wills? You, whose only interest lies in protecting your feeder and thwarting the squirrels, or the squirrel whose only goal in life, nay whose only mission in life, is to hoard away any and all food that it comes across?

I rest my case. Not even the most determined baffle manufacturer can win out against this cute little rodent with food on its mind. If, however by some freakish chance some manufacturer or other does manage to find the perfect baffle, retribution won't be long in coming.

Don't believe me? This isn't made up and really happened to me. Early on a Sunday morning the sun was shining, the birds were happily chirping away, and a breeze was blowing in through the open windows. All was as it should be on a peaceful Sunday morning. That is until I heard one persistent sound





that eclipsed all the other pleasant sounds. A scratching noise that hardly ceased and which was constant enough to rouse my curiosity especially when it didn't stop any time soon and only gained in intensity.

Being the curious soul that I am I crawled out of bed and stuck my head out through the open window. The sight that greeted me was enough to hold me speechless for a few minutes. A squirrel gnawing away furiously through my carefully constructed squirrel baffle for the ground feeder!

It was attempting by any means possible to get through to the tantalizing cache of seeds that it could see. "Oh, so close and yet so far!" I could hear this chant going through its head as it kept doggedly on at its appointed task. I was fascinated enough that I kept watch without interrupting his efforts, and darned if I wasn't rewarded with the sight of him triumphantly breaking into my feeder.

That was the first and last time I believed that squirrel proofing worked on an indefinite time period. Don't get me wrong, squirrel proofing your feeder will work but don't expect miracles, especially not where these little rodent geniuses are concerned.

Most baffles are in truth, probably only squirrel resistant not and not squirrel proof, but that means they will work, so don't get put off buying one. Just keep an open mind and remember that nothing in life is foolproof, least of all squirrel baffles. After all, Man has yet to outwit a hungry squirrel.

The same goes for raccoon baffles as well. These little creatures are also notorious for raiding feeders, albeit mostly ground feeders. If you go the route of baffling your ground feeders as well you might just find that an ingenuous raccoon has tumbled your feeder over in effort to get at the seeds inside.

So, what can you do?

Well, the easiest and most obvious choice is for you to invest in a commercially made baffle. Most are actually quite good and do a pretty good job in protecting your feeder. Another option that's open to you is for you to build your own baffle. This can be easy enough and might even be quite easy on the budget. An inverted sheet metal cone placed over your tube feeder or underneath your hopper or gazebo feeder works quite well in stopping squirrels.

One of my favorite squirrel proof methods I learnt from my grandfather and still employ to this day. This method only works if your feeder is pole mounted and won't work as well for other feeder types although you can always try.





Grab a block or a handful of lard and smear it all over the pole. No matter how hard the squirrels try they just won't be able to climb the pole. On seeing this one of my friends remarked that it was a little like watching “Mission: Impossible” in real life! Only one or two squirrels have ever managed to get past this system, and if they do I let them take all the seed they want, after all if they got that far, they deserve all they can carry away.

Of course the other option that I use doesn't employ any kind of baffling device or home remedy. Instead I set a separate feeding platform full of seeds and food a little distance away from the bird feeder, for the squirrels and raccoons. This works well for all seasons, but be warned that if no food can be found in either feeder your friendly squirrels will become downright unfriendly until you supply them with food. You might even wake up to the sound of gnawing like I did.





Bird feeding controversies

So, what's all the ruckus about, and why's there so much heated debate about bird feeding? You might even be thinking that it's not worth the time and energy spent in reading this next section. There'll always be some debate at the heart of anything and you'd be true in thinking that, because different people will always have different opinions. And you know where that leads you – straight into the heart of debate.

As a bird lover though, I tend to listen when these things crop up and reserve my judgment for when the heated debaters have at least made some valid points on which I can ponder, and on which I can make a sound decision. So here's the long and short of it for you to decide for yourself.

On the one side of the coin there's the belief that by feeding birds we're contributing negatively to nature. We're taking away the birds' initiative to go and find food for themselves, thereby making them dependant upon us. What this could possibly mean is that eventually the birds would simply forget how to find their own food and would eventually, in time, decline and become extinct. This is a serious possibility, and should be taken as such, not scoffed at.

On the other side of the coin however, we have the people who say that bird feeding won't contribute in any negative manner to either the environment or to the birds themselves. In fact, bird feeding helps to preserve birds especially in suburban neighborhoods, and during the long barren months of winter where food is scarce.

By placing bird feeders for we help the birds to survive in conditions that perhaps they just aren't equipped to handle. Have you ever seen a bird emerge triumphant from the midst of snarling lines of traffic, having just dug a juicy worm from beneath the hard surface of the road?

My taking on the whole thing is quite simple really although anyone can disagree with me. I believe that birds are more intelligent than we give them credit for and are quite capable of fending for themselves. They would survive regardless of whether we put food out for them or not and I believe this holds true even for the barren winter months although some people would argue this point vehemently.

Personally speaking, I do my bird feeding rounds not through any sense of altruism but for the sheer pleasure that I derive from watching birds of all sorts come into my garden. If it was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was harming the birds and their natural habitat by feeding them I would stop in an instant – I have no wish to cause any harm to any living creature.





There is however, no proof and the birds aren't any worse off for my feeding them. The one thing I absolutely won't do though is to try and feed them anything out of the ordinary that isn't part of their natural diet. Some people might do this unthinkingly and I now caution you to think twice before you do that – you are making a significant change in the birds' diet and this can have a serious impact on bird habitats and patterns. There are also certain foods like chocolate that is simply toxic for the birds and these should be avoided. I've mentioned these in the section “What not to feed birds”.

Taken separately, and as ever, this debate (or controversy) has both its pro's and its con's and the decision, for the moment, is purely in your hands as to whether you feed the birds in your vicinity or not. Just make sure and make the decision that you feel is right for the birds and look after their welfare accordingly.

Also remember that in most states handling of any wild bird is considered illegal, for full details go to your local animal or bird shelter. Wild birds have been defined as non-domestic birds.





Precautions

If you're undertaking to keep a bird feeder in your garden, there are a few things that you should become aware of besides proper maintenance and regular bird feeding schedules. These are things that beset any bird feeder at some point or other and can be overcome for the most part with only a minimal effort on your part.

I've gone into some detail on the three most common problems – besides squirrels – that can overcome your feeders and in some cases cause the death of some of the birds. In most cases there isn't anything more that you could have done to prevent any of these events from happening, but a quick review might assure you that you're taking the utmost precautions possible. Sometimes however, nature just takes its own course and there's nothing you can do to stop it. Acceptance of these situations that are beyond your control can be a great plus.

Bird diseases

One of the number one causes of death amongst birds in any setting is bird diseases. This could happen in a number of ways and need not even be as a result of anything that you've done. Bird disease can strike up in a number of different ways, but the rapid spread of such diseases can happen as a result of interaction between birds that congregate at bird feeders, bird houses or even bird baths.

What to do to prevent bird diseases

A diseased bird can quickly spread their illness through a feeder, so regular maintenance of feeders is a must if you want to avoid such things. Also, irregularly cleaned feeders can in themselves be the cause of such diseases. For more on the maintenance of your bird feeder go to the section "Maintenance".

Germs and parasites that cause many bird diseases can live for days in food so if you notice unusual behavior of the birds gathering at your feeder take action immediately and clean out your feeder immediately. Throw and clear away all old seed hulls and food stuffs that might be left on the feeder and rinse it in the ten percent bleach solution that I mentioned earlier in the "Maintenance" section. (One part bleach to nine parts water) Also remember to wear gloves to protect yourself from contamination as well.

Water troughs or nearby bird baths should also be cleaned out as soon as possible since water is as good a carrier of the parasites and germs as food or bird droppings. Give these a thorough scrubbing first before filling them with fresh water.





Even under normal circumstances water should be changed frequently as it can become polluted very quickly. Along with that if you also have bird houses you should make sure that these too are kept as clean as possible. Every little helps in preventing the rapid spread of disease.

Even if there is no disease apparent amongst the birds that flock to your feeder, it's always a good policy to keep all of these as clean as possible to further prevent any growth of disease causing parasites and germs.

Keep alternate or extra feeding stations

Another good way to keep your garden disease free is to supply more than one bird feeding station for your birds. I realize that this might actually be going against all common sense, but really if you just think about it, adding more feeders to your gardens ensures that overcrowding at feeding stations isn't a problem.

Overcrowding leads to easy spread of disease and lessening this situation can help you to vastly control such situations. Adding more than one feeding station can also attract different varieties of birds to your garden as well as solving your overcrowding problem.

Signs to look for, warning you of possible bird disease

Birds coming to your feeder or trough will be less alert and perky

Activity levels of the bird are little to none

Most times birds will tend to huddle or cower on the feeder platform or perches

No desire to fly will be evinced and they may just stay there for some time

You might notice some birds having difficulty in swallowing, dropping their food back onto the feeder. This could be caused due to sores in their throats or mouths

Feathers will tend to look not so shiny, and will even take on a bedraggled appearance.

Known common bird ailments

There are a few common diseases that spread through the bird populations and these are common enough that scientists have identified them. Here's a short list of a few the more well known bird complaints.

- Salmonellosis
- Avian Pox
- Trichomoiiasis
- Aspergillosis





Window collisions

Although you might laugh when it happens, window collisions are among one of the leading causes for bird deaths. I know it's just plain laughable to watch as they fly into your windows but sometimes tragedy can strike and a death can result of this.

Sometimes though death isn't the assured outcome that you might be led to believe. One particular such incident that happened a few years ago has stuck with me so much so that I tell this story to any and everyone willing to listen to me.

It was one of those gorgeous sunny days that you get that just invites you to go outside and enjoy the day. Unfortunately I was stuck indoors and found myself doing some long overdue spring cleaning in the bedroom.

Deep into my cleaning and fairly buried in paperwork and old oddments – I'm a noted packrat – I heard a tap-tap-tapping. Naturally I looked around to see what the cause of this tapping was but was reluctant to disturb the organized mess I had surrounded myself with so didn't take too much notice. I wasn't worried as the sound wasn't too alarming. That is until it started on a more continual basis.

There I was sitting half buried in my closet popping my head up occasionally to peer over the bed to see what the noise was. By this time the tap-tap-tapping was getting to be familiar and rhythmic. There would go the tap-tap-tapping again, for perhaps a minute, followed by another minute or two of silence before the tapping would once again resume.

Curiosity is also another of my besetting sins and before long I found myself undoing all my organizing and getting up to go and investigate what the strange noise was. Now I know that some of you might be thinking that I should have done this almost from the beginning, but let me tell you that I've never seen "Psycho" or any of the other scary movies and had no thought of any of these in my head. (Although I still haven't seen them you'll be happy to hear that I'm more cautious now. It's true, age does bring some wisdom.)

Anyway, to get back onto subject, the tap-tapping was still continuing unabated so having recognized that the tapping was coming from somewhere within the room, I set about trying to pinpoint the exact location. This didn't prove to be too hard and I had soon enough found the source of my curious tap-tap-tapping. One of the most beautifully colored hummingbirds was coming up to my bedroom window and tapping away at it!





It would keep pecking at the glass for a short while then fly off for a small breather before coming back to once more resume its futile efforts. I don't claim to have an insight into the bird mind – although my brothers regularly call me bird-brained! – but it seemed to me as if that small hummingbird was attacking its own mirror image in the glass thinking it was a rival. Eventually it flew off giving up, to fight another day, probably frustrated and awed about his opponent right down to its little birdy toes. It did however come back over the next few days giving a repeat performance before flying away defeated every time.

Although it was fun to watch, ultimately this behavior would've harmed the little hummer so I overcame this problem by placing a white sheer curtain over that portion of the window so that the hummer didn't come back to attack his rival.

How to prevent collisions

Other things can be done to avoid this same situation and just as easily. Your first course of action should be to watch and see exactly which windows the birds will try to come at. The behavior of my hummer need not be the only reason why birds will come at windows, there could be many reasons and sometimes by figuring this out you can put a stop to the unwanted window collisions.

Most times birds will become confused by the reflection of sky or wooded area in the glass and try to fly through. This too, can be overcome by placing a pair of sheer white curtains in your window, or by adding larger, birds of prey decals onto the windows. I've found that a lot of birds will stay away from what they perceive to be a threat. Or perhaps you could hang a hawk silhouette just outside your window so that it sways in the breeze giving it a semi-lifelike appearance.

Another way to break up the unadorned window is to place ornaments such as sun catchers etc. on the window. Hanging shiny ornaments in front of the window is also a good idea as this will give the birds pause for thought before flying into the window. I would avoid hanging plants as this might just add to the confusion leading the birds to believe that they're coming into the safety of some nice shrubbery.

Alternately if there is a food or water source nearby birds are also likely to hit windows in their confused states if they are bidding to escape something. The best thing to do for this then is to locate the feeder either within two to three feet of the window or further out beyond ten feet.

You might be wondering why on earth you'd be locating your bird feeder so close to your windows if you're trying to avoid window collisions, but the reasoning behind this is pretty straightforward. By placing the feeder closer to





the window the birds have less time to gather enough speed to collide fatally with the window. It should also be noted that window feeders don't actually promote collisions and are quite safe to put up.

What to do if you find a stunned bird

If you find a stunned bird just outside your window wait for a short while first. For the most part if they're only slightly stunned a bird will get up and fly away almost immediately or within a short period of time. If this doesn't happen then you should take matters into your own hands to keep it from getting into the clutches of either cats, or birds of prey.

Never, ever, handle a bird with your bare hands so first of all don a pair of gloves. If the weather is cool place the bird in a well ventilated box that's in a warm area. Make sure that they have the ability to find their way back outside however as otherwise you'll have another problem on your hands.

If the weather is warmer then place the bird out of reach of predators and leave it be. If you suspect a greater injury has occurred then take it to your nearest animal shelter or vet to see what can be done. In this case keep the handling of the bird to a bare minimum.

Cats

For anyone living in the western world there's really no way that you could have escaped knowing about the long standing feud between Tweety Pie the yellow canary, and Sylvester the house cat. There's just no getting around the fact that cats love birds and I don't mean in a nice way either. It's an inbuilt form of recognition – when cats see birds they see flying targets that spell "Food" for them. It's really no surprise then that the famous duo of Sylvester and Tweety are mimicking real life.

If you're putting up a bird feeder in your garden you need to be aware that these loveable fur balls who keep us as their owners can and will pounce on anything that even remotely resembles a bird. So going with the adage that forewarned is forearmed you can then set about trying to at least make your bird feeder feline proof. Cats are another reason for most deaths of birds in the domestic environment.

Although this might not always work it's still worth a try, and if you yourself are proudly owned by a cat there are ways and means of separating your own Sylvester-Tweety duo. Although I'm not owned by a cat many of my friends are, and these friends have also been persuaded by me to have bird feeders in their yards as well. Naturally in the beginning there were some teething problems but pretty soon it was sorted to the advantage of all concerned.





If the cat in question stalking the bird feeder is yours then a simple solution is to keep your cat indoors as much as possible especially during those times when you know that the birds come regularly to feed. This might not always be a possibility as cats are such individual creatures who love to come and go as they please, but it's always worth a try.

The cats might not appreciate it at first but there's always the compensation for them of being able to curl up in your favorite easy chair. This will naturally enough be placed in direct line of sight of the bird feeder so they can watch with frustrated pleasure as all those lovely morsels of food go flying around.

There's a good chance though that the cat you're trying to protect your feeder from isn't yours but is your neighbor's or just a stray who lives off the neighborhood offerings, in which case you'll have to take different measures.

These precautions will also come in handy for your own cat as well. Remember though that all these are just precautions, and just as with the squirrel baffles there's no absolute guarantee that they'll work.

If it's your neighbor's cat then you always have the choice of asking them whether they could place a bell on their cat so that birds – and you – are alerted whenever it comes into your garden.

Let's face it though, you can't always be within hearing distance of your bird feeder and there's always a good chance that the cat would have found a way to get rid of his bell collar once he cottons on to the fact that the bell is the reason all the yummy food is flying away. I never underestimate the thinking powers of a hungry cat or squirrel, many a time have I been outwitted by these creatures!

You could always set up the bell system around your feeder tray but there again you have the problem that the birds might just become used to their own disturbance of the bells and not take any notice of it. Stringing bells around your fence might also work but in this case they'd need to be soft ones so that your neighbors aren't tempted to report you for noise pollution.

Another option that you could always look into is buying cat repellent pellets. There are some excellent ones on the market these days and they tend to work pretty well. The downside with these is that if it rains within a few hours of your scattering the pellets or you water the garden by mistake then the pellets won't work.

Also you'll need to invest in bird friendly pellets so as not to accidentally poison them. In this case I tend to just scatter the pellets pretty far away





from where I've kept my feeders and don't use it all that regularly. If the cat doesn't even set foot in the garden then there's not too much use from these pellets either. If they instead use the fence or tree as a convenient launching point the pellets become a moot point.

Positioning of your feeder is one of the prime ways to handle this situation so along with watching out for flying squirrels and possible perches for them you'll also have to make sure there's no handy place for a cat to use as a jumping point either. If your garden isn't extensive and is bordered by fences this might be slightly difficult but there are ways around this as well.

You could use or make your own cat baffle, a simple device along the lines of a squirrel baffle but purpose built to handle cat problems instead. Some baffles are built to serve the dual purpose of a roof for the feeder as well as a being a squirrel deterrent. So even if your feeder has a roof if you place another one on top when the cat tries to jump on to it, the baffle should tip with its weight and overbalance it.

One good baffling device that I was told about involves stringing a line of wire between two trees or a tree and your house. Before securing the remaining end string on to the wire a string of 1 foot long tubing pieces. You could also use old washed out milk jugs and run the wire from the bottom end through to the cap end. String all of these end to end. If either a cat or a squirrel tries to walk the wire the consequences are hilarious as they can't keep their footing and will fall off. This is especially good for squirrels.

All of this is of course, well and good in theory but might not work in practice for you. The only thing that I can advise you to do is to try until you find something that works for you. For my part I use a combination of these methods and frequently rotate them so the cats don't become too complacent.





Bird Flu

With all the headlines that the Bird Flu virus has been grabbing I felt that I should make a cursory note of it in this book as we are dealing with birds on an almost regular basis. It should be noted I think that at the time of writing this book no strain of the H5N1 avian virus has been found in North American wild birds or even domestic birds although it has been found in Asia, Africa and Europe.

For more information you can contact the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), or the Washington Department of Agriculture, or even the Washington Department of Health. Any of these institutions can give you up to date news and advice on the H5N1 viral strain.

However, if you're worried here are a few tips for you to use when dealing with your feeders and birds in general.

Always wear gloves when cleaning your feeders, or bird droppings from your feeder sites

Don't handle sick or dead birds if you can help it, but wear gloves if you don't have a choice

Don't eat or drink anything while cleaning your feeder sites. Smoking is also not good to do whilst doing the cleaning

Wash your hands thoroughly after every cleaning or contact with birds even if you were wearing gloves while you were cleaning your feeders

Wash and disinfect all tools and appliances used for cleaning





Making your garden bird friendly

There are many ways to make your garden bird friendly so the birds start coming more regularly to your feeder. You don't need to incorporate all these methods, but just by using one or two of these you'll find the attraction of your garden spreads further a field than you would expect.

In fact one day not too soon after I planted a few shrubs and flowering plants in my yard I found that more and more birds were coming to my feeders. Since I hadn't expected this kind of a response I was a little startled to say the least and promptly rushed out to buy more bird seed! Having invited them into my garden I couldn't very well leave them to go hungry could I?

Be that as it may I found that with each little bird friendly improvement that I made to my garden the more I attracted birds to my feeders and the more likely they were to come back again and again. Once or twice I even found myself naming the more distinctive and friendly ones. But, Shhh! that's a well kept secret, no one knows that I did that.

The only reason I started on improvement efforts to my garden was because a fellow bird lover had recommended I try it. You would think that after so many years of feeding birds in my backyard that I would have cottoned on to the fact earlier, but I'm sad to say that I hadn't. It took me a whole change of scenery before I fully appreciated what a bird friendly garden could do for my feeders.

It all came about one fine day when I was outside in my brand new garden inspecting my brand new bird feeder. I had only just recently moved almost clear across state and I knew not a soul in my new neighborhood. Sure my family were closer to me but they didn't live next door so I was slightly surprised to hear a friendly voice asking me sympathetically if "the little critters hadn't yet showed up".

This not unnaturally caused me turn around quite abruptly scattering some of my bird seed on the ground but I was still unable to attach a face to the voice. Before I could follow up any notion that I was getting help from some higher being on my bird feeding efforts I was confronted with the cheerful face of my neighbor. I had only been here for about a week and during that time had only had time to set up a trestle bed for me and a bird feeder for any birds that were lurking about, in between mad dashes to work.

I didn't recognize the voice but I had seen this same face making the same mad dash for work in the mornings that I was. This not unnaturally endeared me to my unknown neighbor and we had set about giving each





other a passing wave as our cars passed. So I was pleased and a little curious as well. Did my new neighbor also feed the birds? Had I finally come across someone else who was as madly passionate about bird feeding as I was?

Being the forthright person that I am I asked these questions without any further delay, it was always good to meet another birder. So I was glad and relieved when I was answered in the affirmative. We immediately bypassed the little social niceties and got down to talking about birds and what my problem was (with the birds that is!).

I soon found that what I had been taking for granted in my old yard was clearly not in evidence here. The previous owners hadn't been too picky about whether their garden was bird friendly and clearly hadn't made it so.

Over a good cup of coffee and muffins I sat down with my new best friend and hashed out what was wrong and what I could do about it. Some of the suggestions were long term and some were a mite expensive for my budget at the time, I had after all just moved! But all in all I could implement most of these suggestions. They would just take me a bit of time.

When I mentioned this with great dismay, since any delay would result in the delay of having the joy of many birds in my garden, my friendly neighbor only looked at me with twinkling eyes and suggested that I call it all a "work-in-progress". I was happy with that, but I changed one teensy thing, it would be my habitat that would become the work-in-progress, not the birds'.

That might sound crazy to some people – especially to my homemaker sister who, bless her ingenuous heart, helped me set my own house to rights before long – but that's just the way I am. I love my birds and I love to look after their welfare by feeding them and providing their little bird hearts with their "creature" comforts.

Anyway, here are a few tips and ideas that you might be able to use to make your garden more bird friendly. I didn't use all of them, but I have it on the best authority from my birder friends that these are good ways to improve your yard to make it more bird friendly.

Food

If bird feeding's your interest and you've already bought a feeder station that's one of the first steps in making your garden bird friendly. It not only attracts birds but it also entices them to come into your yard and see what they can find.





The next step is providing feed regularly and without fail. This will entice them into coming back. For a choice on what to feed your birds go to the section called "What to use as bird feed".

Since the whole idea in getting yourself a bird feeder was to attract birds to your garden this is the best place to start. You might however be doing everything right with your feed like I was and still not be attracting any birds to your feeders.

Try using some of the next steps to help you in your attempts.

Cover

This was one of the things that I took for granted whilst in my old house. Without my conscious knowledge even, there had been enough shrubs and covering plants that the birds could use in case of emergencies.

Birds might come to your feeder once but if they don't feel safe there's a good chance they won't come again. It's a bit like having the sword of Damocles hanging over your neck, you never know when it's going to fall.

So provide adequate cover in the form of trees and shrubs and you might just find that the birds are coming to your garden on a regular basis.

Nesting sites

Provide adequate sites that birds can use as nesting sites. They might not use it but at least they've come into your garden to investigate. Different birds use different sites and materials for nesting purposes so don't try to provide everything at once.

Do a little digging and find out what types of birds are most common in your area and what kind of nesting sites they use. You can then go on from there and provide for these facilities. If you also provide some of the materials, artistically scattered about your garden you may have won yourself friends for life. Some birds will come back time and again to the same nesting site if they feel secure enough.

Bird Houses

Bird houses come under the category of nesting sites and are one way that you can entice birds into your garden. Remember that some birds will spurn your offer of a fine bird house and will instead go and build their own so don't be offended. The consolation is that there are many other birds who will like the idea of a bird house and who won't have a problem with bringing up their young in the latest bird mansion or country cottage.





Dead trees / Logs

Something else that you wouldn't necessarily think about keeping in your yard is a dead tree or a log. These provide excellent nesting sites as well and more bird species than you would think build their nests in these.

If you have any dead trees in your yard think about keeping them but first make sure that they're not a hazard to anyone around you. If you don't like the sight of a dead tree in your back garden then think about replacing it with a log. These can make equally good nesting sites and will sometimes even make great features in your landscaping efforts.

I avoided the whole dead tree issue by placing a few logs in strategic places that birds would feel comfortable in visiting. And I was even praised on my natural flair and artistic eye on placing a log in my garden!

Bird Baths

I've mentioned it many times before but I'll mention it again. If you want to bring more birds into your garden there's no better way than providing them with a ready source of water, especially in the winter time. And bird baths are a great way to do just that, especially if you go in for a heated bird bath or one that comes with a separate heating attachment.

Since I don't want to bore you with a recap of this I'll direct you instead to the section marked "Water" for a more detailed excursion into the realms of birds and water.

Trees and other shrubs

I thought it only right to provide you with a short list of trees and other plants that you could use in your efforts since I've been going on about it so much. These might not be right for your area however so remember to check up on the trees and plants that will thrive best in your area and make sure that they're also the type to attract the birds. That is after all what this whole endeavor is about.

A few trees that birds favor

- Red Mulberry
- Black Gum
- Beech Trees
- Holly
- Dogwoods





- Oaks
- Crabapple
- Evergreens

A few shrub varieties for your birds

- Spicebush
- Wild Grape
- Strawberry
- Trumpet Honeysuckle
- Washington Hawthorne
- Viburnums
- Common Juniper
- Blueberry
- Various vines

Flowering Nectar plants

- Zinnia
- Lupine
- Aster
- Butterfly bush
- Azalea
- Columbine
- Delphinium
- Honeysuckle
- Clover





A Small Note

I’d just like to say that I hope you liked reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. My yard is now just about complete and properly bird friendly but I don’t think that I’ll ever stop making improvements to it if I can attract more birds to it.

Anyway, I hope that what I had to say was informative and that you didn’t come away feeling disappointed. Perhaps I even managed to spark your interest some more and you now have more bird feeders in your garden than you know what to do with! If all your “bird feeders” are like my five year old niece then you’ve still gotten a good deal out of it.

Whatever the case may be, all I can hope is that you too can experience at least one tenth of the joy that I get from feeding and watching all the birds (and squirrels) that live in my backyard.

Enjoy!

