Spring Backyard Cleanup Tips Keep Birds Safe

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Spring Cleaning

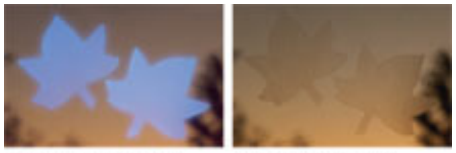
Keep Wild Bird Safety in Mind

pring is a busy time of change for the wild bird population. As the days lengthen and the temperature warms, many birds define and defend their territory, molt, construct nests, mate, and prepare for their coming young. Of course, the increased activity these spring instincts create can make for some wonderful bird-watching opportunities. But it also means we have to be much more conscientious about the health and safety of our wild neighbors as we clean, repair, and rearrange our homes and yards.

Safely Cleaning Outside Your Home

Even in the mildest climates, winter can take its toll on your house and surrounding yard. Tree branches are often knocked down or broken, house siding can be loosened or pulled away, and a film of dirt and dust usually coats your windows and air vents. While inconvenient to any home owner, winter wreckage often creates a safe haven for wild birds and animals. Therefore, care needs to be taken to ensure yearly repairs and maintenance do not damage the precious sanctuaries that many wild birds rely on as winter transforms into spring.

WINDOWS - Clean windows let you better see and enjoy the outside world. But dirt-free windows also pose a collision hazard to wild birds as they flit around your yard in search of food and nesting materials. Prevent potentially deadly accidents with your spot-free windows by using visual clues to alert birds of a window's location. Hang plants, sun catchers, or other visible objects in front of your windows inside your home. Or, use electrostatic window alert decals that reflect UV light to help birds steer clear of that otherwise invisible glass, all without obstructing your view of your yard and its inhabitants.



What birds see What we see

Window Alert Decals are clearly visible to birds, but virtually invisible to us.

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SIDING AND WALLS - Though dangling house or garage siding is an eyesore, it may also offer beneficial wind shelter to a wild bird that has built a nest behind it. Similarly, small wall openings may create the perfect burrow or nest location for birds, squirrels, or other animals. Before you fill an opening or repair damaged siding, inspect the area for any signs of animal residence. The simplest way to do this is to loosely plug holes with insulation, cloth, or paper. Then wait a few days. If the filling material is undisturbed, reseal the hole with a more permanent patch material. If the temporary filling has been tampered with or removed, a more thorough inspection of the area is needed. If a pair of wild birds have nested inside your exterior walls, it is best to hold off on repairs for a few weeks until the young birds have fledged.

Nesting Huts

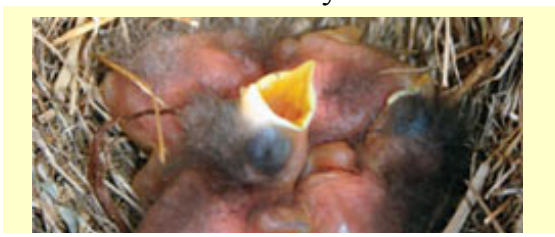
Provide wonderful nesting options for your wild birds

Bird Houses

TREES - Whether knocked to the ground or attached to a tree, wild birds use tree limbs to perch, nest, and rest. Before you remove a pile of fallen branches, observe the animal activity that surrounds it. Unless there is a stockpile of seeds or nuts beneath the branches, most birds and animals will only forage in a single location for a short time. However, if a single bird continually leaves and returns to the same location within a branch pile, chances are she has either begun to build a nest or already hatched some young. Care should also be taken when trimming branches around your home. Be especially watchful for bird nests. If you damage a bird nest, the best thing to do is reconstruct it as best as possible and then leave the area alone.

Safely Cleaning Inside Your Home

How you clean and maintain the inside of your home could have a major impact on the wild birds and animals that live outside of it. Open chimneys, dryer vents, and attics make inviting nesting areas, since each usually offers warmth, security, and protection from the elements. Each year, many wild birds and animals are injured and orphaned by well-intentioned home owners. As you clean and repair your home's interior keep an eye out for birds that have nested or entered your home from an outside opening.



CHIMNEYS - Because of its warmth and high elevation, it makes sense that wild birds would choose to build a nest in your chimney. Unfortunately, if you

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do find a nest of young inside your chimney, it is best to wait until the babies have left before you clean it. If you haven't already done so, it is also beneficial to cap your chimney with an inexpensive cover, available at most hardware and home repair stores. Never attempt to smoke any animals out of your chimney. Young birds may not be able to climb out of the structure on their own and the results could quickly turn disastrous.

DRYER & STOVE VENTS - Like chimneys, vents around your home can make a wonderful, warm and secure nesting spot for a pair of birds. Again, the best route to take if a nest is found is to wait until the young have left. Once you are sure these openings are clear of any wildlife, cover any open vents with screening to help prevent similar occurrences in the future.

ATTICS - Since they are seldom used for anything other than storage, the relative quiet, warmth, and protection that attics offer wild animals makes them ideal nesting grounds. However, because of their typically large spaces, tracking animals or birds and their young down in your attic may turn into quite an endeavor. If you cannot wait until attic guests have left, you may want to enlist some professional assistance to help limit damage, eliminate harm to the animals, and prevent other animals from taking up residence in your home.

How to handle unexpected animal guests

If you discover unwelcome house guests, it is best to tolerate their occupancy until they naturally leave the premise. The natural birth and weaning cycle of most animals is relatively short and you may be doing nature well to harbor a nest of young for a few weeks. If you cannot wait, there are humane tactics that may encourage a mother and her young to move out early.

Keep in mind, however, that many wild birds are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Therefore, it is illegal to move or eradicate protected birds you may find in your home. As such, curbing their nesting instincts early (by capping chimneys before spring, for example) is, in many instances, the only way to prevent a few wild animal squatters in and around your home during spring. But if you absolutely need to encourage wild birds and their young to leave the area, attempt one or both of the following tips:

The Sound of Music – Most animals relish quiet. Silent surroundings let young mothers be more aware of approaching predators. You may be able to use this to your advantage. By simply turning up the volume on a radio placed inside your fireplace or attic, the increased sound level may encourage a mother and her young to seek shelter with a little more solitude.

The Light Effect – Like humans, animals need their rest, and many of them find it under a blanket of darkness. By turning lights on in your home or attic, you may humanely drive nesting animals away.

Spring is an active time for animals and humans alike. Spring cleaning is really about opening our homes to the light, smells, sights, and sounds of the outdoor world after the deluge of winter blues. And though it may be your backyard you are cleaning, for at least a few weeks, the pile of branches, your chimney, or your attic is a young wild animal's entire world.

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