Feeder Favorites for Wintering Birds

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Not all birds leave their summer breeding territories in autumn. Rather than flying off to warmer lands abundant with food, these birds remain behind and scavenge throughout the food-scarce months of northern winters. While they have developed adaptations to survive the cold, they rely somewhat on human-maintained feeders to help meet their caloric needs. Below are some of the more common species that winter over, along with quick facts and their feeder-favorite foods.

American Goldfinches

Though these birds lose most of their yellow coloring in winter, they are still one of the most eye-catching winter birds. Goldfinches live along streams and in wooded and park-like areas. They move about in flocks in winter, scouring open fields for exposed weeds.

Feeder favorites: Nyjer thistle seed and black oil sunflower seed.

Woodpeckers

The Downy, Pileated, Red-headed, Hairy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers are common year-round residents. They consume wood-boring insects from tree bark in winter, as well as seeds and fruit. Woodpeckers are common to wooded areas and residential areas.

Feeder favorites: Suet, sunflower seed, nuts, and dried fruits and berries.

Blue Jays

Some species migrate, but many Blue Jays stay the winter. They form small flocks in winter to search for food. Some Blue Jays cache food collected in summer months to locate and eat in winter. Blue Jays live in woods and suburban areas.

Feeder favorites: Cracked corn and sunflower seed; may eat mealworms, too.

Black-capped Chickadees

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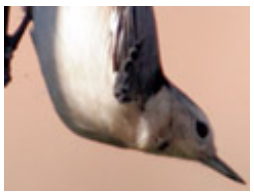
An abundant backyard winter species that is not shy - you might even be able to train them to eat from your hand. Chickadees form flocks in winter to find food or to roost for warmth and shelter. They are common in forested and residential areas.

Feeder favorites: Sunflower seed and suet.

Tufted Titmice

This crested bird forms family flocks in winter to search for food and roost. It does not eat all the food it finds immediately. It stores some in tree bark and other areas, to retrieve at a later time. Titmice are common in woods, parks, and residential areas.

Feeder favorites: Suet and sunflower seed.



White-breasted Nuthatches

Nuthatches store food in crevices of bark for winter consumption. They have a stubby tail and are often seen walking headfirst down tree trunks. White-breasted nuthatches are found in woods, parks, and suburban areas.

Feeder favorites: Suet, sunflower seed, and peanuts.

Cardinals

The male Cardinal is probably the most easily recognized winter bird. His red coloring is a welcomed sight against a snowy background. At night, Cardinals may roost together in thick shrubbery or conifers to conserve heat. You'll see Cardinals in shrubs near open or wooded areas, and also in suburban yards.

Feeder favorites: Sunflower, safflower, peanuts, and cracked corn.

Slate-colored Juncos

You'll see Juncos in small flocks, eating at ground level. Though they do not use birdhouses for nesting, they may roost in a man-made house in the winter for warmth. They are found at the edges of woods or in shrubs and brush.

Feeder favorites: Cracked corn and sunflower seeds from a feeder placed at ground level.

Song Sparrows

This streaked bird migrates only from its northernmost range, but stays year-round in most of its U.S. range. Song Sparrows live in dense shrubbery at the edge of open areas such as marshes, fields, lawns, or streams.

Feeder favorites: Seeds and fruits from a feeder placed at ground level.

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Mourning Doves

These long-tailed Doves form strong monogamous pairs that sometimes remain together through the winter. Mourning Doves like open areas, including farms and urban parks. **Feeder favorites:** Cracked corn, sunflower seeds, and fruit from a feeder placed at ground level.

Offer These During the Winter Months

Black Oil Sunflower Seed

5-Tier No/No Feeder

Recycled Platform Feeder

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