Fall Feeding Tips

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Wild bird fall migratory activity begins as early as mid-August. As birds get ready to fill the airways, backyards come alive. Flocks form. Birds leave. Others pass through. By early September, over-wintering birds are scouting areas for now ripening natural foods, and for backyard feeders they can rely on through the fall and winter months. Keeping feeders filled in early fall, though birds may not eat much at this time, is key to attracting them as the weather cools. If you live in an area where winter snows can suddenly cover natural food sources, your backyard feeders can become an overnight sensation.

Dietary Considerations

The diet of wild birds varies widely by species. They may eat any combination of insects, worms, seeds, fruits, or vegetables. Though seed is seldom the sole item in any bird's diet, it is by far the easiest to handle and most cost-effective form of nutrition you can supply. We recommend you offer high-quality seed regularly, especially throughout the winter months, and then supplement with fresh fruits, which most birds seem particularly fond of when overripe, and vegetables as the season and your budget allow.

At the very time food becomes hard to get, cold weather increases the calorie requirements of birds. You can provide wild birds the nutrition they need at this time by offering seed mixes with a high fat and energy content, and offering suet, cakes of high-energy fat blended with seeds and nuts.

Feeder Choices

Seed can be thrown on the ground, or set on a stump or along a porch railing. This approach, however, will not keep the seed dry, or safe from scavengers like squirrels and mice. Snow and blowing leaves will quickly make scattered seed difficult, if not impossible, to find. For best results, you need to install a variety of feeders at different heights and locations, to appeal to the tastes of birds common to your area.

The following feeders offer good protection for seed during cold, wet weather:

Tube feeders are cylindrical tubes with openings up and down the tube - perfect for Chickadees and Goldfinches. Tube feeders are a good choice for sunflower seeds. Hopper feeders are bins that hold seeds that spill out of the bottom as the birds eat. Many birds will come to these - including larger birds like Blue Jays, Grackles, and Starlings. Squirrel proof designs are available. Hopper feeders are also a good choice for sunflower seeds. Bowl feeders are hanging bowls that typically are covered by a dome to keep out the rain and snow.

Suet Feeders protect this high-energy food from predators inside a sturdy wire

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mesh.

Outdoor wild bird feeders can become breeding grounds for mold and disease, especially if neglected over the winter. Whichever style feeders you choose, be sure to shake them out thoroughly before re-filling. Remove any old, wet or moldy seeds and hulls. Use non-toxic Microbe-Lift Birdfeeder Cleaner for removing any bird droppings, organic debris, or mineral deposits that may be stuck on metal, plastic, vinyl, fiberglass, or poly-resin bird feeders. Also, when conditions are comfortably above freezing, disinfect feeders regularly with 1/4 cup bleach and 2 gallons of water, and rinse, then let dry before re-filling.

Water

Sometimes water is harder to come by in winter than food. One of the best ways to get wild birds into your yard is to provide unfrozen water, replenished as needed. Install a heater in your bird bath, or purchase a heated bird bath with the warmer built in. These are thermostatically controlled to operate only when needed to keep the water just above 32 degrees. Because they do not actually heat the water, there is no danger birds will become dependent upon them as a heat source.

Become a Four-Season Feeder

Wild birds have successfully evolved for millennia without help from mankind. Because nature provides, they seldom go hungry. However, the food we provide certainly improves the quality of their life. Feeding also brings us closer together, enabling us to enjoy their animated, colorful and tuneful company. Once you begin feeding wild birds, they'll return again and again to your feeders and waterers, so you'll want to keep them filled year-round.

Recommended Products

Black Oil Sunflower Seed

Giant Combo Feeder

Never Melt Suet

Green Solutions Upside-Down Suet Feeder

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