

# Effective Pond & Birdfeeder Deterrents

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

The beauty of fall brings with it challenges for backyard pond keepers, not the least of which are falling and blowing leaves. The last thing you want is heavy debris in your pond at the time when it needs to be cleaned and prepped for winter.

At the same time, as nights chill and the amount of natural food dwindles, your pond and wild bird feeders become more attractive to many types of scavengers. Fortunately, there are easy steps you can take to prevent fish loss, and to ensure that feeders serve their intended purpose.

## Debris control

Most ponds should be protected with [netting](#) in the fall, especially those with trees nearby. To be effective, netting must be installed properly. To prevent the build-up of leaves, it should be staked tightly across the entire surface and elevated in the middle so the wind can sweep leaves to the edges.

A good way to do this is to float one or more large balls in the pond. You can also set long wooden or plastic stakes into submerged plants to prop up the netting, or even tie it up if you have an overhead attachment point.

If any debris slips through the netting, it should be removed with a dip net as soon as possible so that it does not become soaked and sink to the bottom.

Pond netting is barely visible. In most areas it is a good idea to keep it on throughout the winter. It can be removed in late fall if no additional debris is expected, or if snow or ice build-up can be a problem. If you choose to leave it in place over winter, it will not interfere with the operation of your [de-icer](#).

When leaves begin to change color, it's time to pre-condition your pond for winter. For tips on pond cleaning and water conditioning, read our article, [Make Your Pond Winter-Hardy](#). Included are recommendations about removing sediment from the bottom of your pond with a [vacuum](#) or [net](#), making a partial water change, and [skimming](#) the surface. These steps are all important to-dos before you install protective netting.

## Predator Control

### Ponds

In the fall, predators that pose the greatest threat to pond fish are raccoons, opossums, muskrats, beavers, otters, foxes, and bears. Herons and kingfishers may also visit for a

last meal before heading south where they can become a nuisance to other pond keepers. Small ponds with shallow areas are the most vulnerable. Here are some of the best ways to protect your pond from invaders:

- **Hiding places** can save your fish. Lowering plants to the pond bottom does more than protect them from freezing, it also provides a more secure environment for your fish. For even better protection, provide strategically placed safe havens for your pond fish with [Koi Kastle Pond Fish Shelters](#), create caves out of rocks, or place sections of wide diameter black PVC tubing or plastic culvert - held in place by rocks - on the bottom of your pond. However, if you encounter an agile predator like an otter, consider a fish refuge, which is a hard mesh cage that allows fish in, but keeps predators out.
- **Netting** protects your pond, particularly at night, when predators are most active. Most will not want to risk getting entangled and move on. Because it is lightweight, it will not deter aggressive, chewing pests.
- **Motion sensors** are great for nighttime protection. Plug one or more into exterior lights and they will startle away the majority of predators.
- **Fencing** is recommended if you expect frequent visits from predators. Electric fencing is easy to install and will deter most non-flying predators.
- **Decoys** are deceptively simple, but work. Some predators are territorial and will not intrude on an area they perceive as already dominated by one of their kind. Others simply won't risk attack from a natural rival like a snake or owl. For optimum effect, decoys need to be moved about frequently so that predators don't catch on.

## Feeders

If greedy squirrels or other scavengers are bullying birds and gobbling seed at your feeders, here are a few feeding methods that baffle them every time.

- For pole mounted feeders, a [baffle](#) underneath provides good defense. It acts as a collar to blockade them from climbing up to the feeder. You can also baffle them from above - a good idea if your hanging feeder is located close to a squirrel launching point.
- Many feeders are enclosed inside an attractive metal cage that allows birds to come in and access the feeding ports, but is spaced too small to allow squirrels through. In frustration, they usually give up.
- The weight-sensitive, [spring-operated perches](#) on some feeders close off seed

access to squirrels or heavier birds. You adjust the spring's tension to the weight that fits your needs.

- To avoid damage from deer, position feeders at least six feet from the ground. If your feeder is threatened by a bear, you must bring it in until the bear changes his routine and moves on.
- Provide squirrels an alternative. A [squirrel munch box](#) provides ready access to the food they crave.

Don't wait to experience fish loss or feeder damage. Predator-proof your pond and feeders today. With smart practices and the help of innovative products, you can keep your backyard a safe and welcome place for wildlife.