

Feeding Wild Birds

Most important of the three essentials for bird life is food. Water and shelter play a lesser role. Feeding may be of two different kinds -- summer and winter. Correct feeding requires varying diet with the season. Summer feeding is usually unnecessary but will bring more birds to the feeding area for people to enjoy. Winter is the important time for feeding. Begin in early fall to attract and hold birds that would otherwise migrate farther south. Once lured from their natural wintering areas, birds concentrate around feeders in larger numbers than the area can naturally support. They are known dependants. Feeding must continue until spring when natural foods are again abundant.

Bird Diets

Feeding birds is largely an art which must be learned through experience and observation. On the basis of diet, birds may be roughly separated into seed eaters and insect eaters. This division is not a clean one, for most fit both categories at some time in their life. The use of several different feeders or combination feeders should satisfy requirements of all.

Bird Foods

Suet - Insect eaters like nuthatches and woodpeckers will consume large amounts of suet when insects and larva are not available. Avoid stringy suet. It is hard for birds to eat. Suet may be made available plain or in any large-mesh container. A better way is to grind it, melt in a double boiler, and pour into molds to harden. It is more durable if the melted suet to any of the seeds or mixtures listed below. Melted suet or suet-seed mixtures should be placed in suet stick feeders while in a semi-liquid state.

Peanut Butter - May be used in place of suet in manner described above. It is much more expensive, however, Look into obtaining substandard quantities for bird feeding.

Seeds - Even insect eaters consume some seeds, especially in winter. Seeds will attract many different kinds of birds. Grocery, pet, or feed stores will carry the following materials for seed feeding.

- sunflower
- hempseed
- millet
- buckwheat
- wheat
- cracked corn
- rice
- chopped nuts
- oatmeal
- bread crumbs (dried)
- popcorn
- commercial birdseed mix

Dog biscuits, rabbit food, raisins, and other such items are also used in mixtures. A good homemade mixture is 3 parts sunflower, 3 parts hempseed, 3 parts millet, and 1 part buckwheat. Several mixtures should be experimented with to complete the diet.

Hummingbird food - A solution of 1 part sugar or thinned honey to 4 parts water. Red food coloring may be added or the outside of the feeder painted an attractive color.

Placement of Feeders

Feeders should be placed with protection in mind. Squirrels, cats, or other predators should be unable to gain access to feeding stations. Escape routes to nearby trees or shrubbery must be available. These cover plants also provide a place to Perch before going to feed. Feeders should be protected from Weather by facing them away from the wind. South or east sides of buildings provide the most sun and warmth. Placement must also consider ease in servicing and refilling. Locations where large drifts form or high ladders are required will likely result in empty and ineffective feeders.