

# Beginning Backyard Birding

Learn the how & whys of the hobby

Whether you live in a downtown apartment, a city home or in the country, birding begins at home. Providing water, food and nesting sites in your yard will help increase the opportunities for observing birds. Most importantly, you are helping them to survive as you continue to move into their habitat. You can help many species that in recent years have struggled to find suitable nesting and foraging habitats.

Now, I want to clear up one of many myths. If you begin feeding birds and then stop, they will not die. Wild birds are extremely resourceful and will just go to another backyard feeder station if you are unable to fill your feeders or bird baths. When you begin filling your bird baths and feeders again, your feathered pets will miraculously return to your feeding station. Consistency in your bird feeding program, however, is still the best way to go.



## FEEDER STATION PLACEMENT

The most successful way to attract birds is to set up several types of feeders together along with a bird bath. Place your station where you can bird watch with your naked eye from a favorite area in your home. The placement of feeders can also affect the well-being of your birds, so try to place your feeders and bird baths in a sheltered part of your yard where there is a reasonable amount of sun to keep the birds warm and keep the seed dry.

Put your station within reach of cover but not so near that predators can creep up on the birds. Coming to the same place for breakfast, lunch and dinner makes your friends vulnerable to predators, particularly the ground feeders such as juncos, lazuli buntings, tree sparrows, chipping sparrows and white-crowned sparrows.

## BASIC FEEDERS

**Tube or tower feeders** for black oil sunflower seed (in shell or chips) usually hang, but may be mounted on a pole. They need large holes for sunflower seed, perches and a tray to catch the shells and seeds that fall out. They are best made of cedar, redwood, pine or good quality plastic.

**Hopper and/or gazebo type feeders** with a flat wide base, also for black oil sunflower seed (in shell or chips) may also hang from a tree or pole or can be mounted on a deck, pole or tree stump. This type of feeder usually rations the seed from the bottom level and has a canopy.

**Platform feeders** for ground feeding may hang, rest on legs or sit on a tree stump. This may be a hollowed-out fence post or a log placed on the ground with small chunks of fence post attached underneath so it will not rot. Single wooden platforms with raised sides to hold the white proso millet and/or sunflower seeds that are scattered on it are favorites for birds. A mesh base for water to drain away is also very desirable inside this simple platform feeder. Tree stumps of various sizes and heights also make charming platform feeders. Leave the bark on and help make you feeders even more nature-friendly.

**Tube feeders** for Nyjer thistle are usually plastic and have tiny one-eighth by one-sixteenth inch oblong slits with perches beneath or above each slit for the birds to pull out each thistle seed. A thistle sack made of nylon with tiny holes just large enough to allow a bird to pull a single seed out of the sack is an inexpensive and delightful way to watch the birds feed. Six or more birds at a time may hang upside-down or right-side-up on your sacks.

**Suet feeders** are wire cages that are coated so they will not rust, or simple plastic nets that are found around a frozen turkey. Onion net bags will also do. All three suet holders will hold chunks of beef suet from the butcher shop or commercial squares of rendered beef suet. A suet feeder is more effective hanging or tied down so that large birds, squirrels and dogs will not carry it away to munch on.



*it's for the birds . . . and you.*

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## FOOD

**Black oil sunflower seeds** come in the shell and in chips. It is the best all around seed and is high in protein & energy.

**White proso millet** is a tiny, round cream-colored seed that ground-feeding birds prefer. If you feed this seed directly on the ground below your feeders and/or on a platform feeder you will attract more birds to your feeders. This is the seed that birds usually knock or scratch out of your hanging feeders, as most of the sunflower eaters do not like it, or the birds that do, knock it to the ground where they like to dine.

**Nyjer thistle seed** is a gourmet food that only three bird species really enjoy. They are the American goldfinch, pine siskin and house finch. This seed comes from Burma and will not reseed.

**Suet** is another high energy food that your feeder birds enjoy and need year round. It is prepared commercially for winter and summer eating. Your feeder birds that migrate need it all summer to build up their bodies for migration in the fall. The year-round residents need suet to survive our cold winters. Suet is also one of the first foods a parent will feed its young. Fresh beef suet is also available from your butcher.

**Peanut butter & yellow corn meal** is a good attractant for birds and also high in protein and energy that most birds like. Mix it together almost half and half. Don't use seeds with hulls, but you may add sunflower chips or peanut chips if you wish. Push into hard Ponderosa cones and hang by your feeders, or place into inch-deep, quarter-sized holes in a natural log or branch and hang.

## WATER

The number one attractor to your backyard, year-round, is a bird bath. What a joy to watch a robin bathe or a family of newly fledged mountain blue birds drink and splash in your bird bath. A simple bird bath can be made out of anything that is non-toxic and can hold shallow water. Even a garbage can lid (the plastic ones are best) makes a great bird bath. Add a flat rock or a branch to weight the lid down and give the small birds a perch. The base to a plastic flower pot is also a handy and inexpensive bath.

Birds like bird baths hanging as well as directly on the ground, on a tree stump, on a post/pedestal or a deck. Be creative and build your complete feeding station around your bird bath.

## CLEANING

The last very major part of a feeding station is to keep your feeders & bird baths clean. Feeders are easy to clean with hot water and a brush.

Bird baths occasionally need to be cleaned with household bleach. Just add a half-cup or so depending on the size of the bath to the existing water. Let it set for a few minutes until the mineral deposits disappear. Use a hose or bucket to dilute, then brush out the bleach & water with a soft, natural or nylon brush. Flush out until clean and refill with fresh water. The bleach will not harm your lawn, flowers or shrubs.

Remember, keep your birds happy and they will keep you happy in return. They are "cheep" therapy.



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