

AGRICULTURE

Keep birds happy with properly equipped yard feeders

Birds are beautiful, fascinating and very, very necessary. Without them we would be knee deep in bugs. I'm not exaggerating one bit.



Take, for instance, some of the birds around here. Walter Schultz in "How to Attract, House and Feed Birds" gives some examples of pest consumption.

An oriole's diet consists of 84 percent caterpillars, beetles, grasshoppers and click beetles; 75 percent of a woodpecker's diet contains boring beetles, ants, caterpillars and fruit and fruit-wood insects.

Bobwhites love all destructive agricultural pests such as potato beetles, weevils and cutworms. Chickadees zoom in on tent caterpillars and their eggs, flies, plant lice and weevils. And, robins aren't always pulling up earthworms — they are addicted to ground beetles, grasshoppers and caterpillars.

Since many birds stay in the same area all year round, it is important to keep 'em happy with properly equipped feeding stations, plus a nearby water supply.

Feeders range in construction from a simple board to simply ridiculous, so choose your own style. The important factors are placement in a safe area and provision of shelter or cover, if possible.

Place food for ground feeders on a low board, but only enough for one day, to avoid attracting mice and other unwanted small animals. Ground feeders include sparrows, juncos, cardinals, thrushes and mourning doves.

Off-ground stations must occasionally be protected with metal bands, etc., to ward off varmints. Open feeders can be made more secure by surrounding with corn shucks, providing a place for birds to hide. Augment with your old Christmas tree after the season is over.

Our main objective right now, however, is what is placed on these feeders for finches, grosbeaks, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, mockingbirds and others.

The first rule is: Do not stop once you've started. Your feeding program may have encouraged certain birds to overwinter. They may die if you cease to feed.

Use any of several good commercial mixtures, but avoid ones loaded with red millet, says Leonard Short of Birds 'n Hand seed company.

Sunflower seeds and hearts are a favorite food, especially for the cardinals, which, by the way, is the only bird that eats safflower.

Finches are known to love thistle but it is so expensive now you may want to avoid the purchase and stick to sunflower hearts. Also, try peanut hearts, those little bitter kernels that stick to one side when you separate the nut.

Provide a side dish of grit. This essential part of a bird's diet can be clean, washed sand, but there's also ground up oyster shells, limestone and granite

dust. Ann Reilly at Park Seed suggests mixing one teaspoon in one quart of any food that you are preparing.

I always turn to any suggestions from mother-in-law, The Bird Lady next door who lovingly caters to her all-year customers, but also provides for corn-loving geese, ducks and other seasonal visitors like orioles and finches.

She mentioned that bird lovers usually fail to provide enough suet — so do it. Suet is ideal for maintaining the high body heat of birds, which can range from

100 to 112 degrees Fahrenheit. Put a piece of beef suet in a net and anchor securely on a limb.

You'll be rewarded with stepped-up visits from woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and warblers.

Pine cones filled with a mixture of cornmeal and peanut butter can be similarly attached. Peanut butter must always be mixed with something that will prevent the birds' beaks from sticking together.

Save your kitchen scraps. The Bird Lady has served up apples, apple peels and oranges for the

grosbeaks and orioles; old cake and raisins are beloved by mockingbirds, robins, catbirds and thrushes.

As always, I save the best 'til last — annual publication of the Bird Lady's

Chickadee Pie
Ground or finely chopped suet
Corn meal
Peanut Butter
Corn or table syrup
Raisins, old bread, cakes, bread crumbs (optional)
Mix well. Place in reamed-out citrus rind and refrigerate until

placing on feeding station. Take a chickadee to lunch today.

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