

Winter Bird Feeding Tips

While many of our commonly seen bird species travel to warmer climates for the winter, a few hardy souls remain. To maximize the number of species that you attract to your back yard, we have a few tips and tricks to share.

Feeding birds through winter can actually improve traffic at your feeder, since many birds will find and stay where there is a reliable food source. During the cold winter months, birds rely on high fat, high energy diets that should include suet, black oil sunflower seed, and safflower seed. Shelled corn and peanuts are also good choices, but may attract squirrels and other critters to the feeders as well. Providing a source of fresh water may be the most valuable gift to those who tough out the long winter months. Placing a heating element in your bird bath or using an electric bird bath to keep the water open will encourage many species to frequent your feeders in winter time.

Here are a few additional tips and tricks for your winter bird viewing pleasure:

1. Provide a variety of different food choices in a variety of feeders. Many birds, such as finches and chickadees, don't mind the swinging motion of a hanging feeder, but cardinals and grosbeaks prefer a stationary place to sit and eat. Birds such as juncos, titmice, and sparrows like to eat off the ground or from a tray feeder.
2. Keep seed in your feeders at all times. Birds will come to rely on your home as a major food source, so make sure to keep the shelves stocked!
3. Having water available will enhance the number of visitors to your yard. Birds need water to drink and bathe in to keep their feathers clean. And don't worry, birds are smart enough not to bathe when it's extremely cold.
4. Avoid seed mixes as they will usually contain a high percentage of fillers like red millet, which the birds do not like to eat.
5. You can make your own high energy suet at home. Form the suet into logs or blocks, or spread it onto the bark of a tree or pine cones. Here are a few recipes to try:

WOODPECKER STICK RECIPE

From U-M Dearborn EIC

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup lard or any animal fat
- 1 cup flour
- 3 cups cornmeal

Mix well. Add peanut hearts or other seed to mixture. Form into balls or squares that will fit into your suet feeder.

PINECONE RAISIN MIX

From U-M Dearborn EIC

- 4-1/2 cups rendered suet (From meat department at grocery store.)
- 1 cup dried and crumbled whole wheat bread
- ½ cup shelled sunflower seeds
- ¼ cup millet
- ¼ cup raisins or chopped, dried apples

Melt suet in saucepan over low heat. In large bowl mix together rest of ingredients. Allow the melted suet to cool and thicken slightly, then pour into mixture and stir thoroughly. Stuff mixture in between the "petals" of a pinecone. Hang in tree.

FRUIT SUET

From U-M Dearborn EIC

1 pound lard or other animal fat

½-1 cup peanut butter

Approximately ½ loaf of stale bread or bread-like product – make into crumbs

½ cup flour

½ cup cornmeal

1 cup sugar

½ cup pecans, peanuts or other nuts chopped into small pieces

1 cup finely diced apple, raisins or other fruit – can use dried fruit if like

Melt the lard/fat and peanut butter over low heat. Mix the flour, cornmeal, and bread crumbs together. Pour in the peanut butter/lard and mix well. Add fruit and nuts. Pour into a 9 x 5 pan and refrigerate, use as needed or pack directly into suet feeder and hand outside.

BIRDER'S OAT CAKES

From: attractwildbirds.com

1 pound suet

1 cup "quick" rolled oats

1 cup yellow cornmeal

1 cup chunky peanut butter

1 cup mixed wild bird seed

1 cup sunflower seed hearts

Put suet in pot and melt on low heat. Stir in remaining ingredients and blend well. Pour into muffin tins, chill until hardened.

BIRD CUPCAKES

From: Birds & Blooms

1 cup shortening

2 cups chunky peanut butter

5 cups yellow cornmeal

Melt shortening and peanut butter over low heat. Stir in cornmeal and blend well. Pour into muffin tins, and sprinkle your favorite nuts, seeds, or dried fruit on top. Chill until hardened.



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