

# Supplemental Bird Feeding

No matter how extensive our wildlife gardens are, there's always room for more food – especially for birds. Choices in feeder types, seeds, and placement of feeders are endless! Here are some general guidelines to follow when feeding birds in your backyard.

## Feeders

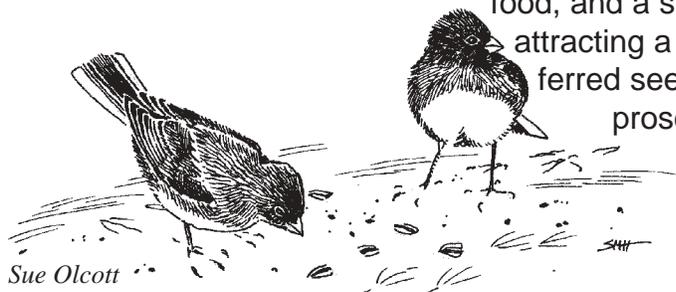
The common feeder types available commercially are:

- **Tray Feeders** – Long lasting and easy to make, this feeder allows a wide scope of vision giving the birds security from predators. It requires drain holes in the bottom and a cleaning gap on one side for easy cleaning.
- **Fly-through Feeders** – These tray feeders have a roof and corner posts, affording a full view around and they keep the seeds dry.
- **Screen Feeders** – The screen floor of this feeder allows wet seeds to dry out from below. The tray is hung by ropes from its four corners.
- **Self-feeders** – These feeders have reservoirs that can be filled periodically with the seeds flowing out at the bottom as they are eaten by the birds
- **Cylindrical Feeders** – Commercially made with large feeding ports to accommodate sunflower and other large seeds, these feeders are also readily used by small birds. Place the perches above the ports to discourage starling use.
- **Niger (Thistle) Feeders** – This feeder has very small slits to discourage larger bills. They attract goldfinches all year. Shorten the perches to 5/8" long to discourage house finches.
- **Window Stick-on Feeders** – Place these feeders in the center of your windows to make it difficult for squirrels or raccoons to reach.
- **Counter-weighted Feeders** – These contraptions have feeding troughs in front and counter-weighted balances in back which cause the feeder to close in front when heavy animals like squirrels stand on the perch.
- **Suet Feeders** – Suet feeders can be wire cages, dowel containers or string bags. They may eventually be overwhelmed by starling use; use starling-resistant feeders which force the birds to hang upside down to eat.



## Types of Bird Food

There are about 20 possible kinds of seeds and nuts found in commercially sold bird food, and a successful mix will contain 5 or 6 kinds, attracting a variety of birds. Generally, the most preferred seeds include black oil sunflower seeds, white proso millet, peanut kernels, and thistle. The least needed or preferred by birds are canary seed, cracked corn, milo, wheat, hulled oats and rape seed.



- **Black oil sunflower seed** is by far the most preferred by backyard bird species. Your mixture should have at least 75% black oil sunflower seeds. The empty hulls that drop below the feeder should be regularly cleaned up and not placed in flower beds, gardens or compost piles because of a plant growth inhibitor in the hulls. It is important to know the difference between black oil and striped sunflower seeds; striped seeds have a longer, thicker shell which is more difficult for birds to crack open.

- **White proso millet** is also an excellent choice and less expensive than black oil sunflower seeds, but your mixture should still contain at least 75% of the sunflower seeds.

- **Niger (thistle)** is one of the most popular wild bird foods because it is so attractive to American goldfinches. It is also one of the more expensive seeds, often costing more than a dollar per pound.

- **Safflower** attracts many brightly colored songbirds while house sparrows, starlings and squirrels don't seem to care for the seed.

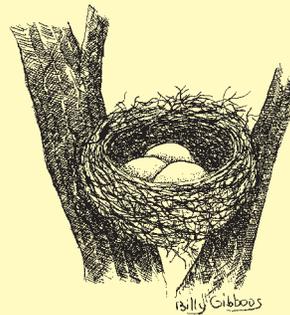
- **Peanuts** are a popular bird food that are easily offered to many birds in hanging hardware cloth feeders.

### Potential Problem Seeds:

Canary seed is not a very common or necessary component of bird food. Black oil sunflower seeds will feed mourning doves and white-throated sparrows just as well and it won't attract as many house sparrows or cowbirds. When offered, cracked corn may attract "problem birds" like house sparrows, brown-headed cowbirds and starlings.

### Many birds also enjoy:

- \*Fruits (apples, oranges, bananas, watermelons & raisins)
- \*Grape Jelly
- \*Peanut Butter
- \*Suet



# Potential Problems at Feeders

Raccoons feeding at bird feeders should be discouraged. They are attracted to suet feeders, hummingbird nectar and seeds. Methods to discourage raccoons include hanging suet bags on small branches that are too slender to support the raccoon's weight, temporarily remove nectar feeders to break the raccoon's feeding patterns, and smear feeder posts with lithium grease – raccoons don't like grease in their fur.



The striped skunk normally feeds on insects and fruits and may occasionally be attracted to the area under feeders where it will be looking for grubs, beetles, mice and fruit. Keeping the area under your feeders cleaned up will usually be enough to keep skunks from becoming regular visitors.

Many songbirds are killed by house cats. There are a few solutions you might try such as keeping the cat indoors especially at dawn and dusk, as well as placing your feeders and bird baths at least 6' from trees, bushes and other hiding places. Attaching a bell to your cat's collar does not actually solve this problem, despite what many people may think. Cats are clever and learn to move slowly without making a sound even with a collar on.

House sparrows are not native to the U.S. and are a significant source of songbird mortality as they kill incubating females and chicks in the nests. Because this species is exotic, it is not protected like our native songbirds are. You may selectively remove house sparrows from nest boxes.

Another exotic nuisance bird, the European starling, competes with native songbirds for nesting cavities, driving away bluebirds, tree swallows and chickadees. Limiting the hole size in nest boxes to 1 1/2" or using a slot opening in the box will help deter starlings from using nest boxes designed for bluebirds and other small songbird species.

Your feeders, nestling birds and eggs in nests may be at risk from local chipmunks. Chipmunks also may invade buildings. Keep feeders inaccessible to chipmunks, and don't place feed on the ground if they are a problem.

## Squirrels!

There are three different squirrel species that may visit your feeders: eastern gray, fox and red squirrels. The squirrels may chew up your feeders, eat large quantities of seed and/or prevent songbirds from using the feeders. There are a variety of solutions you might try:

- use squirrel-proof feeders;
- put protective shields (predator guards) on feeder posts;
- place feeders on the ground for squirrels to deter them from using bird feeders.

One of the most effective squirrel-proof feeders is a metal self-feeder with a counter-weight on the back. This counter-weight will cause the feeder to close when the squirrel stands on the front.

