



“From the Potting Shed”
Riverview Garden Club – Helpful Hints
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Here are some tips for welcoming our feathered friends into our gardens during these cold winter months. There are some DIY projects included too!

How to Help Birds in Cold Winter Weather

By Rob Ripma, *Birds & Blooms* Jan. 14, 2022

Whether it’s hot or cold, raining or snowing, birds have to adapt and survive the weather conditions. Here are a few things you can do on cold days to help birds in winter.

Put Food Out Early to Help Winter Birds

On cold winter days, birds need to eat immediately in the morning as they have used energy reserves to stay warm overnight. It’s helpful to provide easy access to food in the morning

Provide Fresh Water

A heated bird bath might be the most important item you can put out in extremely cold weather. By offering a heated bird bath for your birds to drink from, you will not only help them survive but will also attract many more birds than you would with feeders alone.

Offer Birds Shelter from Wind

Building a simple stick pile in the corner of your yard or set up roosting boxes for birds to use. Leave your bird houses up. There are several species that will use bird houses as roosting sites during the winter. Be sure to clean out the old nesting material and block any of the ventilation holes so they can retain their warmth. For the long term, consider planting native trees and evergreens for cover and shrubs for a food source.

Serve High Energy Foods

The more energy birds can gather quickly, the more likely they are to thrive in winter. Peanuts, sunflower chips, and suet are all great options. Not only are they high energy foods, they are also quick and easy for the birds to eat allowing them to feed more efficiently on cold days. Suet is a great source of protein for the birds. This will help them stay warm and survive those extremely cold nights. Peanuts, like suet, are another good source of protein for your birds. Woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees are just a few of the many species that will frequent a peanut feeder.

Refill Feeders Late in the Day

Keep feeders filled with birdseed to help birds in winter. Giving your birds access to full feeders just before sunset will provide them with an extra energy boost.

5 Foods You Should Feed Birds in Winter

By Amy Grisak, *Birds & Blooms* Jun. 30, 2022

Here are five foods birds love that you should add to your backyard menu during the cold weather months. These foods give winter birds the energy they need to make it through chilly days and nights.

1. Suet

Because animal fat is easily digestible, suet provides important calories for a wide variety of birds. The easiest way to feed suet to birds is to get it straight from your butcher. Put the beef fat in a mesh bag (an empty onion bag works) or a wire cage suet feeder. If you prefer, birds will devour premade suet cakes from the store, too!

Attracts: blue jays, cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches, pine warblers, tufted titmice, woodpeckers, wrens

2. Peanuts and Peanut Butter

Don't forget about peanuts. Jays and woodpeckers prefer whole peanuts, while nuthatches and chickadees like the shelled version. Peanut butter is another excellent fat source for birds. It can be served either by mixing it with suet or by spreading it on pine cones or along tree bark known as "bark butter".

Avoid salted peanuts, put them in a tube or tray feeder. *Change peanuts frequently in rainy or snowy weather to prevent mold.*

Attracts: blue jays, woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, titmice and house finches

3. Nyjer Thistle Seed

Thistle seeds attract finches, pine siskins, dark-eyed juncos, and other smaller foragers. Fill a finch feeder with thistle seed (Nyjer) and soon your backyard will be a winter finch haven. The small needlelike seed is a perfect snack for tiny songbirds.

Attracts: goldfinches, pine siskins, house finches

4. Black-Oil Sunflower Seed

The majority of feeder birds prefer high-fat black-oil sunflower seed. It's simple to serve, spread it right on the snow. Black oil sunflower seeds provide the necessary fats for the birds' caloric intake during the winter. Sunflower seed is popular with most birds that winter in the northern regions and is typically easy to find in feed stores or even grocery stores. Safflower seeds are favorites for northern cardinals and grosbeaks.

Attracts: cardinals, grosbeaks, finches, chickadees and nuthatches

5. Dried Fruit and Berries

Some birds, such as robins and cedar waxwings, enjoy dried cranberries, currants and raisins. Offer them mixed into a suet cake or on a platform feeder after soaking them in water for a few hours to soften. Ideally, it's best to grow a few trees and shrubs that have berries in the winter; such as Chokecherry, hawthorn, snowberry.

Attracts: thrushes, bluebirds, waxwings, mockingbirds, yellow-rumped warblers

Try these DIY projects for feeding the birds...



1. Bird Seed Scoop/Funnel

Wash out an empty gallon milk jug and, once it's dry, screw the lid back on.

Cut into the plastic just below the handle, continuing at an angle towards the bottom of the milk jug.

Circle around the bottom and back towards the handle — now the jug resembles an oversized scoop like you see above.



2. Easily refill bird feeders without spilling

Scoop a large amount of birdseed straight from the storage bin.

While holding the jug above the feeder, unscrew the lid and just let the seed empty out, like you see above. With help from this handy scoop, you can easily refill feeders anywhere.

3. Repurpose a watering can to refill bird feeders

An easy funnel replacement for your feeder is your watering can!

Pour or scoop birdseed into a clean, dry watering can and remove the rose.

Hold it over the feeder and pour in the seeds (see above).

The spout is slim and narrow, like a funnel, and can fit easily into the top of any type of feeder, so the seeds slide right in every time you need to refill, rather than scattering.

4. How to Make a Pine Cone Bird Feeder



Gather a pine cone, peanut butter (smooth or crunchy are both OK), a pipe cleaner, a popsicle stick, and a small dish of bird seed. Twist a pipe cleaner to the top of the pine cone. Spread peanut butter in all of the nooks and crannies using a popsicle stick. If the peanut butter is too thick to spread, soften it in the microwave for a few seconds. Next, roll the sticky cone in birdseed. Once the DIY bird treat is finished, hang it in a nearby tree.

5. Peanut Butter Suet Recipe

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup lard
- 2 cups quick cooking oats
- 2 cups bird seed mix
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup flour

Melt peanut butter and lard over low heat. In a large bowl, mix quick oats, birdseed mix, yellow cornmeal and flour. Stir melted ingredients into the dry mix. Once cool, press into molds such as cookie cutters, poke a small hole at the top edge, refrigerate, tie with a ribbon or string for hanging from branches. If you have suet cages, pour mixture into a baking pan, refrigerate and then cut into blocks to fit your suet cage.

How (and How Often) to Clean Bird Feeders

Jill Staake, *Birds & Blooms* Nov. 03, 2022

Follow these tips for maintaining seed and suet feeders to keep your backyard birds healthy in every season. Here's what you should use to clean feeders and how often to do it to keep birds healthy.

- Remove and discard any leftover seed and dust off feeders to remove debris. Spray and wipe feeders with a 10 percent bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) and a stiff brush — an old toothbrush is a perfect choice. A solution of 1 part vinegar to 2 parts water works, too. If a feeder has a lot of caked-on grime, soak it in warm water.
- Alternatively, you can use the hottest water possible and dish soap. Either way, rinse the feeders well with clean water once you're done scrubbing to remove any residue. Allow feeders to dry completely before filling and putting them back up. Wipe down poles and baffles as part of your cleaning routine.
- Many birds feed on the ground, so be sure to periodically sweep up and discard the husks and dropped seeds that have accumulated on the ground underneath your feeders. This will also prevent visits from raccoons, mice and other pests.
- Mild days in early spring are the perfect time to assess the condition of feeders that have been outside all winter. Check for cracks, broken perches or damaged baffles. Repair or replace them if necessary.

Happy Winter Birding!