

Selecting Bird Seed

One of the best ways to attract a wide variety of birds to your yard is to offer them many tempting food sources.

Chickadees, finches, cardinals, and grosbeaks prefer sunflower seeds. Black oilseed sunflower seeds have more energy than other sunflower seeds. Sparrow and morning doves like small seeds such as white millet, cracked corn, and canary seed. Goldfinches are attracted to niger (commonly called thistle) seed. Blue jays, robins, cardinals, and cedar waxwings like fruit and berries. Add raisins and chopped apple and banana to the birdfeeder for them.

To make an all-purpose birdseed mixture, combine 5 pounds of sunflower seeds with 25 pounds of coarse chicken scratch feed. Don't let the mixture get wet or it will become moldy. Any moldy birdfeed should be discarded where birds won't get it.

To attract nuthatches, chickadees, and woodpeckers, put suet on the menu. Suet, the hard, white fat trimmed from cuts of meat, is usually available in the meat section of the supermarket. Put a chunk in a mesh bag (like those that onions come in) and hang it in a tree. Or find a section of dead tree limb about 18 inches long and 2 to 4 inches in diameter. Try to find soft wood, such as pine. Cut the side branches 2 inches short (the stubs provide convenient perches for the birds), and drill holes 3/4 inch deep all over the log. Attach a screw-eye at the top. Fill the holes with suet (or peanut butter), put a wire or string through the top screw, and attach the feeder to a branch. Or find a large, open, dry pine cone. Tie a string to its base and spread peanut butter over the cone. Roll the cone in seeds or oatmeal, and hang from a tree branch.

Feeders should be hung high enough that dogs and other animals cannot easily pull them down, but low enough that the feeders are easy to refill. Offer suet and peanut butter only in cold weather, when there is less chance that these foods can go rancid.

Remember, that birds need water. If the feeder is not near a natural source, provide water. In the winter the water will have to be replaced frequently when it freezes.