

Feeding Wild Birds

Nuts

Peanuts are the most popular food for garden birds and attract a wide range of species. Be sure to buy from a reputable supplier as mouldy peanuts can kill birds. When feeding during the spring and summer ensure all peanuts are fed from a mesh peanut feeder, as whole peanuts can be harmful to young birds.



Seeds

Black sunflower seed is a highly nutritious and popular food for birds, especially the tits and finches. It has a higher oil level and energy value than the striped-shell variety of sunflower seed, often sold alongside, which tends not to be as popular with the birds, although they will eat it. 'Mixed Wildbird Seed' is often sold at a seemingly good price but often doesn't attract the birds; much of this mixture is either wheat or corn and, apart from pigeons, few garden birds can digest this food source.

Fats

Don't waste any fat! It's a nutritious food for garden birds. Lumps of suet may be hung out, and meat trimmings, bacon rinds and table scraps will also be eaten gratefully. The large 'Fat Balls' which can be bought in pet shops often prove highly popular - you can also make your own home-made version by pouring melted fat over bread or cake scraps to make 'bird cake'. This can be made even more nutritious if some seeds, nuts, oatmeal, grated cheese or dried fruits are added. Use half a pound of fat per pound of dry ingredients. Coconut shells and yogurt cartons make suitable moulds.



Fruit

Often overlooked, fruit will attract several species of bird which may not otherwise visit your garden. Apples and pears cut in half and placed on the ground will attract Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, and in particularly hard weather they might bring in Redwing and Fieldfare. Spearheading cut apples onto the ends of branches will also attract Blackcaps. Smaller fruit such as grapes will also be taken. A coconut sawn in half and hung upside down from the branch of a tree is welcomed and much enjoyed by the tits.

Grain-based foods

These are always available in the kitchen and include bread, biscuits and stale cake. Modern processed bread is not suitable for wild birds and should be avoided where possible. Grated wholemeal bread should be moistened slightly, as this makes it easier for the birds to swallow. Moist bread is also less likely to blow away or be taken off in pieces by the larger, more aggressive birds. Maize flakes, oat flakes and even puppy meal are other valuable food sources. In very cold weather, cheese scattered on the ground beneath bushes should attract wrens and help them through difficult conditions.



Rules of Feeding

1. Feed regularly: don't put out lots of feeders and then forget to refill them. Birds can become dependant on a food source during harsh weather.
2. Only use fresh peanuts and seed. Do not feed mouldy, wrinkled or wizened peanuts or seed.
3. Ensure fresh water is always available for drinking and bathing. An upturned dustbin lid with a stone in it is often all that is required. Be sure to remove the ice in cold weather so that birds can drink.
4. Birds often feed on the ground below a feeder. Make sure that there is no shrubbery nearby that could conceal a cat, and try to keep all feeders at least 5-6 feet above the ground.
5. Remember to wash all feeders and to change the water in the bird bath on a regular basis.

Can I feed all year round?

Winter is not the only time we can help birds by feeding them - feeding between the months of April and October can also be helpful, as there is a great demand on natural resources due to the increase in hungry mouths to feed. Only put out peanuts in a fine mesh container so that parent birds cannot take large pieces that might cause young chicks to choke, and avoid fats completely. Safe foods to use at this time of year include sunflower seeds, pinhead oatmeal, sultanas, raisins, currants and mealworms.

