



Setting Up Your Feeders

Birds have four basic needs: food, water, shelter and habitat. You've come to the right place to get expert advice for setting up a bird-loving habitat. A primary ingredient in the grocery/hardware store seed is called milo and attracts more rock pigeons and house sparrows causing more waste, and less variety of birds due to the limited number of birds who eat milo.

WATCHING THE BIRDS

Is it from the kitchen window or a favorite backyard bench? Keep in mind that your habitat will ultimately determine what species you will attract. The kinds of trees and shrubs you have on your property, whether or not the trees are mature, and the quality of habitat in the surrounding area will all determine what kinds of birds you'll be likely to see at your feeder.

IF THE BIRDS DON'T COME

When you add a new feeder to your feeding station, be patient. Birds are creatures of habit and don't like change. Feeders should be within

eight to ten feet from a landing spot where the birds can check out the situation. If the birds don't come to the new feeder within a week or so, consider moving the feeder, even if it's just one or two feet.

SEED

Different seed served in different feeders attracts different birds. Some birds feed above ground in elevated feeders; others prefer to feed on the ground. Some birds like single seeds; others like a mix. A high sunflower content mix with millet, presented in a tube feeder, serves as an all-purpose mix, as the millet will be kicked out for the ground feeders. If you have more kick-out than ground feeders, switch to black oil sunflower or a non-millet mix. If debris or weeds are a concern, choose sunflower chips or a hulled "no mess" mix such as Pure Patio Mix or Just Hearts.

FEEDERS

Tube feeders will attract a nice variety of songbirds such as house finches, chickadees, titmice, goldfinches, and grosbeaks. Platform feeders will attract the larger birds who need more space,

such as jays, northern flickers, and mourning doves.

SPECIALTY FEEDERS

Specialty feeders reduce competition at feeders and increase the variety of visiting birds. Nyjer/thistle feeders attract goldfinches who like their own space. Nyjer/thistle is a more expensive seed, so this strategy is more cost effective than serving it in a regular tube feeder. Suet feeders can be simple cages, cages with tail props for the woodpeckers or logs with holes. Suet, which contains beef fat and various goodies like peanuts, mealworms, fruit, and nuts, is enjoyed by many birds.

Open mesh nut feeders are liked by chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers and jays. Nectar feeders are attractive to both hummingbirds and orioles. Changing nectar frequently (every 3-5 days) is important. If you add or change nectar feeder styles, add a 6" piece of red ribbon to the bottom of the feeder to more readily attract the hummingbirds.



Chestnut-Backed Chickadee at a Squirrel Buster Feeder. Photo: ©Brooke Miller

FEEDER PLACEMENT QUESTIONS:

- ✓ Is there a tree to hang it from?
- ✓ Will it need a Shepherds Hook?
- ✓ Can I hang it from the eave or from a deck railing?
- ✓ Is it within ten feet of a shrub?
- ✓ What is the squirrel population?

CLEANING YOUR FEEDER

White vinegar is the best non-toxic cleaner to use in lieu of bleach solutions. If there's moldy seed at the bottom, dispose of the seed, take apart the feeder as best you can and clean it well. To prevent moldy buildup, fill the feeders halfway in the winter rainy season so the seed is fresher for the birds. Never add dry seed on top of wet. Los Gatos Birdwatcher cleans feeders on Mondays and Thursdays for a small donation.

WHEN TO FILL YOUR FEEDER

Once per week should be fine. Don't worry that leaving your feeders empty will cause your birds to go hungry. Birds have many different food sources that they check on regularly.

WHEN IT RAINS

Hanging the feeder under the eave helps. Hanging a rain guard or squirrel baffle over the feeder will take care of some of the downpour, but will do little against the wind-driven rain. Change the seed regularly for best results.

WATER

Water is an important part of your feeding station in both summer and winter for quenching thirst, cooling, and helping keep feathers clean and well groomed. Bathing during molting season, spring and early fall, is thought to ease skin discomfort associated with new feather growth. Adding a dripper or "Water Wiggler" attracts the birds to the moving water. Misters are most attractive to hummingbirds.

BATHTIME ETIQUETTE

Place the bath within ten feet of a shrub or tree and far enough away from feeders to prevent shell debris from falling into it. Make sure the bath is near enough to cover/shelter so that the birds have a safe place to preen after their bath.

Cleaning the bath regularly is important for the birds as well as for keeping mosquito larvae from growing. If algae grows, clean the bath with "Superbac" bird bath cleaner or white vinegar and add a few drops of "Fountec" to keep it algae free.

STORING SEED

Store the seed in a metal container, such as our six or ten gallon galvanized cans. Rodents and squirrels chew through plastic tubs. Keeping seed inside the house increases the likelihood of a moth infestation. "Pantry Pest" traps work well to prevent a moth infestation.

FEEDING BIRDS YEAR ROUND

In the winter, natural food is scarce, so food in feeders becomes a higher percentage of their total intake. In spring and summer, feeders give the parents a fast food restaurant to keep their energy up while feeding the babies. The babies get a healthy head start, especially neotropical migrants such as grosbeaks and orioles.

WINDOW STRIKES

Window feeders attract the birds to the feeder, not the window. Putting

the feeders at least 10 feet away from the window give birds maneuvering room. Using "Window Alert" ultra-violet treated decals on the outside of windows warns birds of a barrier.

OUTDOOR CATS

Millions of songbirds are killed by cats every year. To deter outdoor cats from harming your birds, create barriers. If the feeder is hanging from a tree or shepherd's hook, try putting one or two concentric circles of flexible garden edging at 3 and 4 foot diameters under the feeder. This uneven terrain slows down the cat and may give the birds enough time to fly to safety. Put rose bush clippings or commercial "pigeon poker deterrent" under shrubs. If cats are hiding under the shrubbery, trim it up so the birds can see under. Feeders that can be viewed from inside the house, can provide hours of fun for the cats and safe feeding for the birds.

INJURED BIRDS

If the bird survives the impact with the window or a cat attack but does not fly off within one half hour, the bird needs medical attention. Place the bird in a ventilated box with a non-terry cloth towel in a warm, dark and quiet place. Do not feed or water. Transport as soon as possible.

Resources for Injured Birds:

Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley in San Jose 408-929-9453

Wildlife Education and Rehabilitation Center in Morgan Hill 408-779-9372



LOS GATOS BIRDWATCHER

King's Court Shopping Center | 792 Blossom Hill Road, Los Gatos, CA 95032

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