

## EXTENSION NOTES



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### **Bird Feeding**

Fall is the time many of us start to think about feeding the birds. While some folks provide birds with food all year, others only feed during the colder, food-scarce months. For many people, watching birds through their windows is a fun way to enjoy a little bit of nature during a dreary winter.

The food and feeders you choose to set out will depend on the types of birds and wildlife you wish to attract. Consider, too, whether you want to discourage or encourage squirrels from visiting your feeders.

Different birds prefer different foods, so if you want to attract a variety of birds, provide a variety of seeds. Black oil sunflower seed is a favorite of many bird species, including cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, finches, nuthatches and sparrows. If you're new to feeding the birds, this is a good seed to start with. It's inexpensive and available everywhere, from grocery stores to feeder supply outlets.

If you want to dissuade squirrels from plundering your feeders, safflower is a good seed for that. Squirrels will not eat safflower, but cardinals, mourning doves, woodpeckers, blue jays, tufted titmice, finches and chickadees love it. The seed is high in fat, fiber and protein. It's more expensive than sunflower, but you'll get more bang for your buck, because the squirrels won't be gobbling it up.

Goldfinches love thistle or nyjer seed. Because it is so small, it requires a special finch feeder. These are usually clear tubes with small holes and perches. Some come with the perches above the holes, which discourages other small birds from eating the seed. It's also fun to watch finches feed using their unique ability to hang upside down.

Suet is animal fat and a good source of protein. It's usually hung in cages. Suet will attract many birds, but woodpeckers, in particular, love a good suet cake, and with their striking plumage, are a welcome visitor to the winter garden.

Seed mixes, found anywhere seed is sold, are often popular with beginning birders. They're often the least expensive choice and attract many different birds. But be aware that they can cause quite a mess, because birds scatter the seed looking for the type they prefer.

Birds also love other types of food, too, such as pieces of apples and oranges, peanuts, peanut butter and cracked corn. Though if you don't want squirrels, you might want to avoid these.

There are many styles of feeders and the choice often depends on the type of seed you're offering and the birds you want to attract. House or hopper feeders are good, all-purpose feeders that usually have walls, a platform and a roof to keep the rain off. Platform or tray feeders are ideal for ground-feeding birds, such

as grosbeaks, cardinals and mourning doves, and are good ways to lay out a buffet of fruit and nuts. Squirrels, however, will find it very easy to feed from tray feeders, but if you use safflower in them, squirrels will move on.

If you live in an apartment or townhouse, there are feeders available that adhere to the outside of your windows or attach to a balcony.

Squirrel-proof feeders are widely available, but keep in mind that squirrels are smart creatures, and they can usually think their way around most obstacles we humans set for them. But that can be fun to watch, too.

You will attract more birds by using more than one feeder and placing them in different areas of your yard. It's a good idea to position feeders near a tree or shrub, so birds have nearby cover in the event a predator appears. On that note, we do not recommend feeding birds, if there are any outdoor or feral cats in the area. Cats are a major driver in the decline of songbirds and will kill upwards of a billion birds a year.

Clean your feeders once a month. Dirty feeders can promote mold and bacterial growth, which can infect birds and spread disease among neighborhood flocks. Goldfinches are particularly discerning when it comes to a clean feeder. Once a thistle feeder becomes damp and moldy inside, the birds will avoid it. A dirty feeder's foul smell can also attract wildlife you might not want, such as insects, mice or rats. Clean with a solution of one-part bleach to nine-parts hot water. You could also use a mild solution of unscented dish soap.

Once you start feeding the birds, it's a good idea to continue doing it regularly throughout winter. Birds need more calories to sustain them through those cold winter nights, so they will depend on your generosity.

Look for sales. Buying in bulk or stocking up during sales is a good way to save money. Make sure you store your supply in a cool, dry place.

For more information about attracting wildlife to your yard, contact the Carter County office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

### **Upcoming Events:**

- Extension District Board Meeting – Tuesday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM
- Northeast Area Livestock Meeting – Tuesday, November 19<sup>th</sup> @ 6:00 PM; Topic – Understanding Seed Tags; Speaker: Dr. Jimmy Henning, UK Forage Specialist

