

Which Feeder Should You Choose?

Fall is the traditional beginning of the greatest season for the largest number of players. Football? No way. And, it's not the World Series either. It's the classic start of the year-long season of bird feeding. That's right. More people feed birds than watch football or baseball or any other sport. More than 50 million Americans already participate.

The joy of attracting birds is open to everyone and is remarkably easy. Birds will visit your yard when it offers them some of the basic necessities of life: food, water and shelter. The presence of these basics increases the birds' chances of survival and encourages them to make more visits. If these provisions are not naturally available in your yard, you can introduce them by providing food in feeders and nest boxes for nesting and roosting.

"Feeding the birds" ranges from throwing crusts from the kitchen window to supplying commercial feed in feeders. More than 30 million tons of bird seed is put out for birds every year in North America. This can prove a useful supplement in winter or when there are young to feed and can be a lifesaver in spells of unusually hard weather or in early spring when natural food supplies are scarce.

As autumn begins, take an inventory of your feeders. Ideally feeders should be placed in areas that provide nearby cover for the birds and permit you to watch the bird activity from your favorite chair. Having some dense ground cover nearby will help protect the birds from predators.

There are many feeders available commercially and your feeder selection should match the foods you offer and appeal to the birds you want to attract. All feeders fall into these major categories:

Hoppers.

Hopper feeders are available in lots of different styles, but the old favorite looks like a barn or covered bridge. Generally, the sides are made of Plexiglas that allow you to see how much seed remains and ac-

cess is usually through the top. A good hopper feeder can be easily disassembled to be cleaned. Hoppers can be pole mounted or suspended from a tree or hook.

There are two main advantages to hopper feeders: 1) they hold a lot of seed, so you generally don't have to fill them every day and 2) they're big and bird-friendly. Shy birds, or big birds such as doves, blue jays, cardinals and woodpeckers, are able to land and feed from them comfortably.



You can feed any kind of seed from a hopper feeder because the seed usually comes out from slots at the bottom of the Plexiglas panels. Sunflower seed is a favorite of many hopper feeder visitors, but seed mixes containing millet, corn and peanuts can be fed in these feeders, too. Because corn is very attractive to grackles, starlings and cowbirds, you may want to use a mixture that does not contain corn.

Now, a word about squirrels. A hopper feeder suspended from a tree or hook is an attractive food source for squirrels, raccoons and other backyard critters. Not only do they sit on the feeder and eat voraciously, they quickly learn to tip the feeder to dump food on the ground for their friends. If this is a problem in your backyard, we recommend mounting the feeder on a pole with a baffle below. The baffle will help keep the squirrels off the feeder and the more stable mounting method will save a lot of seed.



Platform Feeders. The most basic bird feeder is a board with a lip around the edge to keep the seed from falling off. Such a platform feeder is particularly helpful in a beginning backyard feeding program. Birds have to learn that food is available in your yard and the best way to teach them is to put the food where they can see it. A platform feeder is also a good place to offer

mixed seed so that the birds can review the entire selection and pick what they want. For this reason, a platform feeder attracts more birds than any other type. There are several types of platform feeders that can be suspended from a hook, placed on the ground, mounted on a deck rail or pole mounted.

There are two obvious drawbacks to the basic platform feeder: they offer the seed no protection from the weather and they are completely unselective in both the creatures they attract and the rate at which the seed or feed is eaten. Almost all refinements in design have been the result of an attempt to solve these problems.

The most obvious way to improve a platform feeder is to put a roof on it which will protect the seed from the elements. The addition of a screened bottom allows for ease of cleaning and allows the seed to dry after rain. Round and bowl-shaped feeders often have a cover shaped like a bell, which can be raised or lowered to admit birds of different sizes.



Tube Feeders.

Tube feeders – long cylinders with perches at the feeding ports – are the classic feeders for woodland birds like chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers, nuthatches and finches. All of these birds can perch comfortably on the usually short metal perches on most tube feeders.

Tube feeders are great for screening out large birds such as blue jays, grackles, starlings and doves. Unfortunately, cardinals and grosbeaks will also be excluded because they are too big for the perches. A tray is available for most tube feeders which will catch spilled seed and accommodate the larger birds. Rain guards are also helpful additions for keeping the seed fresh.

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and dry. When choosing a tube feeder make sure that the seed you are planning to use will dispense through the seed ports. Most tube feeders have big holes that let sunflower through but some, such as finch feeders, have small holes especially designed to dispense this-tle (nyjer) or an outdoor finch blend.



Satellites.

If you want to cater to little birds such as chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, goldfinches and siskins, pick a globe or satellite feeder. These can be suspended from a chain or wire so that they spin when a bird lands on

them. Although this may be dizzying, it is no problem for these small clinging birds. Since house finches cannot cling, they will be excluded from the feeder and the more timid small birds can feed without competition.



Suet Feeders.

Suet is a high-energy food source for birds and is a favorite food of woodpeckers. Suet can be offered to the birds in a commercially made suet feeder, a log with holes drilled in it to hold the suet, or in something as simple as the plastic mesh bags used to package fruit and vegetables in the supermarket. If starlings are a problem at your suet feeder, you may want to buy, or build, an upside-down suet feeder. These are very appealing to woodpeckers and the starlings will be unable to reach the suet.



Sit Back and Enjoy the Show.

With appropriate backyard habitat and the proper combination of seed and feeders, you should be able to attract a good assortment of birds. Your immediate surroundings, whether urban brick, woodlot or creek, will affect your success, but having neighbors who feed birds will help. Birds tend to make the rounds of "food patches," and a neighborhood smorgasbord is great incentive for feathered friends.

Fall is a season of change. Trees take on beautiful autumn hues, days grow cooler and shorter and many birds migrate to southern climes. An assortment of resident and migrant birds will settle in our area. Invite them to your backyard.

Stokes, Donald and Lillian, The Bird Feeder Book, Little, Brown and Company, 1987. Thompson, Bill III, Bird Watching for Dummies, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 1997. Burton, Robert, North American Birdfeeder Handbook, DK Publishing, Inc., 1995. Mace, Alice E., editor, Ortho's Guide to Enjoying Birds, 1996. Greiz, Eldon, "The Bird's-Eye reView," National Bird-Feeding Society, Vol. 12, No. 5.



West Nile Virus: An Update

The North and South Carolina state governments continue to actively test for the presence of the West Nile virus by investigating reports of dead birds, particularly blue jays and crows, and by testing mosquito pools. As of September 28, a single dead blue jay had been found to be infected in Cabarrus County, North Carolina. There have no reports of infected birds in South Carolina.

On October 2, 2001 Mercy South Hospital in Charlotte reported a confirmed case of the virus in humans. To date no human infections have been reported in South Carolina.

Most people who are infected with the West Nile virus either have no symptoms or experience mild illness such as fever, headache and body aches before fully recovering. Some people also develop a mild rash or swollen lymph glands. In those most at risk, severe symptoms include rapid onset of severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, loss of consciousness or muscle weakness. Medical treatment should be sought immediately if any of these symptoms occur.

Fall Seed Sale
October 18-21

15% off All Seed

Buy your seed now for the fall and winter season . Pick it up when you need it.

Coming Events

Bird Walks

October 20

November 3 and 17

Meet at Chirp 'n Chatter at 7:30 AM. We'll carpool to a local birding hotspot. Bring your binoculars. (Loaner binoculars are available.)

Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History

Join us on **November 10** for our Fall visit to Hilton Pond. Meet Bill Hilton, Jr. and learn about our local wildlife and the ecology of the Piedmont. Call the store at 803/802-6677 for further information and to reserve your spot. Space is limited.

Extended Hours

October and November Hours

Monday-Thursday	10:00 AM – 7:00 PM
Friday	10:00 AM – 8:00 PM
Saturday	10:00 AM – 7:00 PM
Sunday	1:30 PM – 5:30 PM

Friday, November 23

Stop by on your way to the mall. We'll be open from 6:00 AM until 8:00 PM. Many in-store specials.

Getting the House Ready for Winter

From Bird Watching for Dummies comes the following advice:

After the last brood of bluebirds fledges in late August, take your nest boxes in for cleaning. Rinse with a light bleach solution (a tablespoon or two of bleach in a two-gallon bucket of water) and add a new coat of water resistant stain on the outside (never the inside) of the box. Keep the boxes in the garage until the stain is totally dry.

Repair any worn-out parts and re-mount the nest box. Once the weather starts turning cold, plug up the ventilation holes in the top of the box with moldable weather stripping. Add some dried grasses or wood shavings to the bottom of the box as added insulation for any overnight visitors during cold, damp weather.

Be sure to clean the house and remove the weather stripping in early spring.

Contact Us

Contact us with your questions, comments, or concerns at:

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We look forward to hearing from you.

Dave & Marion Davenport, Owners

Chirp 'n Chatter

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