

How To



Feed Backyard Birds

Turn your yard into an all-inclusive bird resort

Feeding backyard birds is a simple delight. But poor-quality feed, storage and feeder-cleaning practices can ruin even the tastiest and healthiest menu.

A note on safety: Make sure to wash your hands after handling bird feeders and keep your distance to respect wildlife

Here's how to ensure you're feeding birds nutritiously and safely:

Avoid Fillers

Cheap birdseed mixes of ten contain little round, rust-colored seeds called red milo. It's a filler, and most bird species aren't interested in that seed. The same goes for oats, wheat, and canola seeds, which are fillers too.

Check Dates

At big-box, hardware, and pet food and grocery stores, birdseed can languish on the shelves for months. Stale birdseed is a no-go. Before you purchase a product, check for "packaged on" and expiration dates. Higher-end stores tend to offer a fresher, longer-lasting seed. If you can't find dates at all, that's a red flag.



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Choose Natural Ingredients

Splurging on high-quality seed and suet blocks with ingredients like peanuts, almonds, and sunflower seeds may cost three times more, but it'll also bring three times as many birds to your yard.

Observe Food's Smell and Texture

Spoiled birdseed doesn't always have a bad scent, so also look for a strange texture or color and any clumping. Nyjer seeds are extra oily and prone to spoiling. If you're wondering why your finches have stopped showing up, that's probably why. Goldfinches are picky to begin with, favoring fresh seed.

Keep Birdseed Cool

If the birdseed was fresh when you bought it, keep it that way. Store it in a cool, dry, dark place. If you have the right storage conditions, it's OK to buy in bulk. Just break down that massive bag of seeds into smaller airtight containers for easy access when the time is right. Suet can be kept frozen too.



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Clean Your Feeders

Adding fresh seed into a not-so-fresh feeder is a recipe for trouble: Aim to clean seed feeders roughly every two weeks, using a mixture of hot water and vinegar or bleach. Clean your hummingbird feeder every time you refill the nectar, or roughly twice a week.

Make Your Own Snacks

If you go the homemade route, offer a complete, balanced diet and avoid additives like salt and food coloring. Artist and writer Julie Zickefoose invented “Zick dough,” a backyard-bird hit with peanut butter, lard, oats, and cornmeal. But be mindful if you live in a location with bear activity. Hummingbird nectar can be made with one part sugar to four parts water.

Let Your Yard Go Au Naturel

The wildness will attract insects—a fabulous food source—and provide potential warmth and cover. With a wide variety of seeds, insects, and plants on the menu, your backyard will be a bird-friendly smorgasbord—one that never goes stale.

