



North Dakota 4-H

Nature Trails

Feeding Wild Birds



To attract birds year-round one must provide for their basic needs of food, water and cover. Bird feeders, bird houses, a source of water and various plant materials can provide habitat needs for your backyard birds. This lesson provides information on common winter birds, bird feeders and feeding.

Common Winter Birds that Visit Feeders

A number of birds do not fly south for the winter, or in some cases fly only as far south as our state. Some of the more common birds that we can attract to backyard feeders are pine siskins, brown creepers, purple finches, nuthatches, chickadees, cardinals, blue jays, woodpeckers, red polls, juncos, goldfinches and red crossbills.

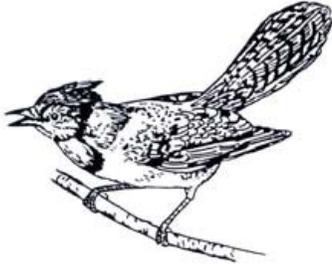
By offering food to these birds in winter we can help them survive the cold, while we take pleasure in having them around. Their songs, colors and lively actions add great deal of enjoyment to our winters.

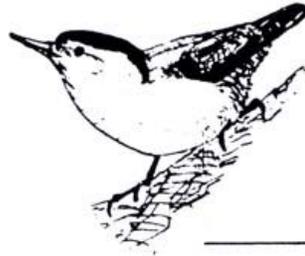
Birds' Favorite Foods

- Goldfinch – hulled sunflower seed, oil-type sunflower seed and thistle seed
- Chickadee – oil-type sunflower seed and beef suet
- Evening grosbeak – sunflower seeds of all types
- Blue jay – whole peanut kernels, sunflower seed and cracked corn
- Purple finch – oil-type sunflower seed
- Downy and hairy woodpeckers – beef suet
- White-breasted nuthatch – beef suet
- Red polls – oil-type sunflower seed, thistle seed, beef suet
- Juncos – red proso millet, oil-type sunflower seed
- Brown creeper – beef suet
- Red crossbills – oil-type sunflower seed

Exercise

On the next page are sketches of birds often seen at winter feeders. Try to identify each using a bird identification book or your library, if needed. Write the name under the picture.



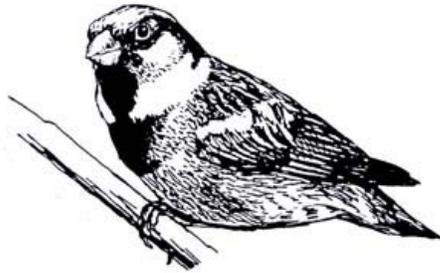












Feeding Wild Birds

Most important of the three essentials for bird life is food. Water and shelter play a lesser role. Winter is the most important time for feeding. Begin in early fall to attract and hold birds that would otherwise migrate further south. Once lured from their natural wintering areas, birds concentrate around feeders in larger numbers than the area can naturally support. They are now your dependents. Feeding must continue until spring when natural foods are again abundant.



Selecting the Right Foods

Feeding birds is largely an art which must be learned through experience and observation. On the basis of diet, birds may be roughly separated into seed eaters and insect eaters. This division is not a clear one, for most birds fit into both categories at some time during their life. The use of several different feeders or combination feeders should satisfy the requirements of all.

Suet – Insect eaters like nuthatches and woodpeckers will consume large amounts of suet when insects and larva are not available. Suet is the fat from beef. Avoid stringy suet. It is hard for birds to eat. Suet may be made available plain or in any large mesh container. A better way is to grind it, melt it in a double boiler and pour it into molds to harden. It is more durable if melted before molding into cakes. Small frozen food dishes make good molds. Suet-seed cakes may be made by adding to the melted suet any of the seeds listed below. Melted suet or suet-seed mixtures should be placed in suet stick feeders while in a semi-liquid state. Stick feeders can be made by drilling holes in a small log or in 2" x 2" lumber.

Peanut Butter – May be used in place of suet in the manner described above. It is much more expensive, however. It should never be fed alone. Mix it with cornmeal or oatmeal.



Seeds – Even insect eaters consume some seeds, especially in winter. Seeds will attract many different kinds of birds. Grocery, pet and feed stores will carry the following material for seed feeding.

Sunflower	Grain sorghum
Wheat	Thistle seed
Millet	Commercial birdseed mixtures
Cracked corn	

Dog biscuits, rabbit food and other such items are also used in mixtures. A good homemade mixture is three parts sunflower seed, three parts millet and one part cracked corn. Experiment with several mixtures to find which one is preferred by the birds in your area.

Grit – Fine gravel or crushed charcoal should be added in small amounts to suet-seed cakes or seed mixtures to complete the diet. Birds have a gizzard and the gravel helps in the digestion of food.

Serving Bird Foods

Having attractive bird foods on hand is, of course, most important. Placement of those foods is important, too. Just as birds vary in size, shape, color, song and preferred food, so do birds differ in feeding behavior. Some feed almost exclusively in trees; others nearly always on the ground and others are opportunists, feeding wherever they can find acceptable food. You may wish to put up a variety of feeders.

Most common birds will visit platform feeders. They are simple to build. You can buy hopper-style feeders that can be suspended by a wire or placed on a pole. Some birds, like juncos, prefer to feed on the ground on seed either kicked from platform feeders by other birds or placed on the ground for them.

Hanging tube-type feeders attract American goldfinches, chickadees and a variety of other species. Tube feeders permit goldfinches to avoid competition with blue jays and grackles which take over the platform feeders. Tube feeders will also attract pine siskins and red polls when they are in the area.

In general, birds which are ground feeders prefer white millet whereas birds attracted to tube feeders prefer oil-type sunflower seeds. Therefore, white millet and mixes rich in millet should not be used in tube feeders or other elevated feeders with small perching surfaces. Suet attached to tree trunks in wire baskets or in other feeders is attractive to woodpeckers and, unfortunately, starlings. In addition to food, birds readily use water placed near feeders.

Most people concentrate their feeding efforts during the winter months. Satisfaction comes not only from attracting good numbers of birds, but also because winter feeding helps birds survive the rigors of cold, icy and snowy weather. Actually, feeding birds year-round is enjoyable. Naturally produced seeds are not available in the spring and summer. Flocks of goldfinches and house finches will visit tube feeders filled with oil-type sunflower seeds during spring and summer months. Cardinals and chickadees will visit daily. Young birds, often with clumps of down still attached, will come with their parents.



Selecting Your Bird Feeder



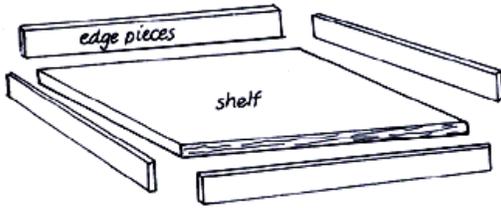
Many types of feeders are available commercially or can be made at home. Simple seed feeders can be made from an empty milk carton or other container. Others can be a piece of wood about 18" x 18" used as a platform. Many seed feeders protect the seeds from rain or snow and are easy to fill and clean. They provide a means to dispense feed gradually so spillage is reduced. Some spillage is OK because birds such as juncos prefer to feed on the ground. A feeder should also have a pleasing appearance.

Hopper-type seed feeders of various designs are the most common and versatile. Some of these limit feeding to certain birds. One type is surrounded by dowels or wire, spaced so that only small birds can enter. Another type has a counter-balanced perch that allows only lightweight birds to feed. Heavier birds trip the perch which closes the feeder door. Other specialty feeders include finch feeders that dispense very tiny seeds such as thistle or *niger* seeds, hummingbird feeders for sugar-water mixtures and suet feeders.

Building Feeders

The next page contains a variety of plans for making a feeder. Construct one or more to place in your yard.

BUILDING FEEDERS



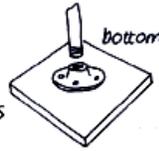
dowels, half-rounds,
or quarter-rounds
for edges

Support from ground
with metal pipe and
floor flange (from
plumbing or hardware store)

Materials

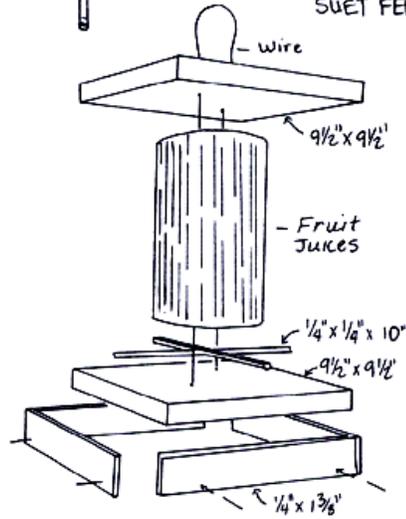
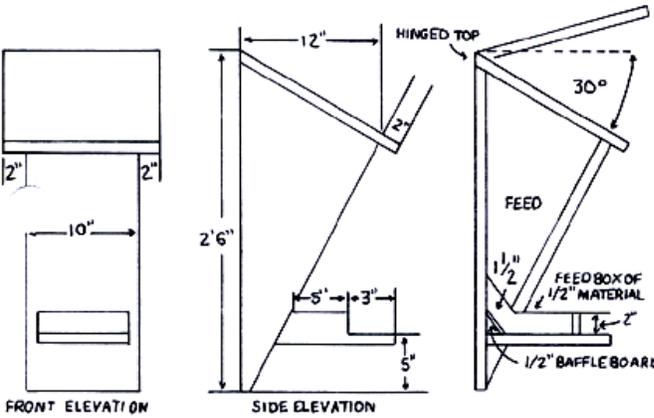
Base 1-18" x 18" x "

Edge 2-18" quarter round } APPROX.
2-17" quarter round } MEASUREMENTS
1 floor flange
1 pipe

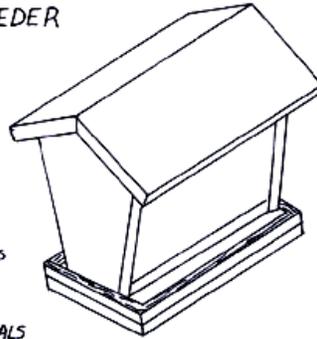
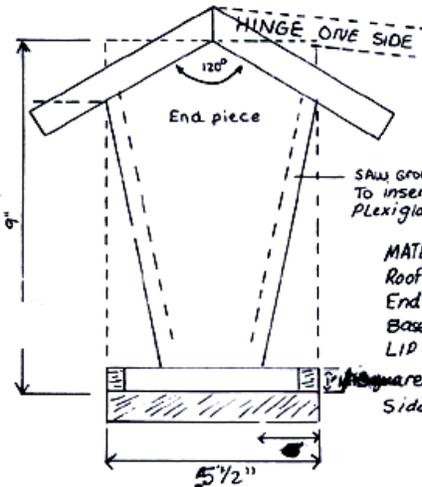


ORANGE or ONION BAG
SUET FEEDER

OPEN FEEDER



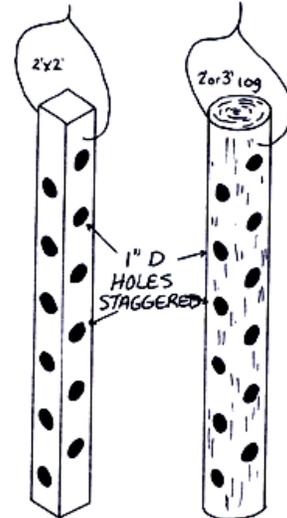
WATER PROOF FEEDER



SAW GROOVES
TO INSERT
Plexiglass

MATERIALS

Roof 2- 1" x 6" x 10" }
End 2- 1" x 6" x 9" } From 4' long 1" x 6"
Base 1- 1" x 6" x 9"
LIP 2- 1" x 1" x 9"
Square 2- 1" x 1" x 4"
Sides 2- 9" x 6 1/2" Plexiglass



MIXED FEED or SUET FEEDER

Questions

1. How many different species were observed? _____
2. Were different birds recorded at different times of the year? _____ Explain _____
