

Feeding the Birds

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October is an excellent time to begin feeding the birds for the winter.

The most popular seed is black oil sunflower seed. In addition to attracting cardinals, titmice, chickadees, blue jays, house finches, Inca doves, and English sparrows, it is a favorite seed of the white winged doves and squirrels. The problem with meeting the demands of squirrels and white-winged doves is that you either need a big budget or you must be content to let them eat almost all the available sunflower seed. There are several tactics that work to keep the squirrels and white-winged doves from eating most of the sunflower seeds. There is an Absolute brand steel feeder with a weight sensitive perch. The steel construction material prevents the squirrels from chewing into the seed reservoir and the weight sensitive perch allows you to close the feed distribution to heavyweights that land on the perch. Namely white-winged doves and squirrels.

Another squirrel thwarting strategy is to feed safflower seed instead of sunflower seed. Squirrels do not seem to like the taste of safflower seed but the seed eating birds will eat it almost as readily as sunflower seeds.

The lesser goldfinches are still working the patches of annual sunflower, and also like zinnias planted for butterflies but allowed to go to seed, but they can be brought into the patio for easy observation by hanging one or more special tube feeders filled with Niger thistle. Later in the winter the migrating American goldfinches will also join them. The small slits on the tube allowing access to the thistle are difficult for white-winged doves to handle. You will eventually have English sparrows and house finches learn to obtain the seed, but the goldfinches will be the most obvious.

There is less waste if only one type of seed is distributed in each feeder. The birds don't throw out their least favorite variety to get access to their favorite seed. The one exception is for ground-feeding seed eaters like Inca doves, Lincoln sparrows, and thrashers, I provide a mixed seed source including millet, sunflower seed, and even cracked corn on a low platform. Only provide enough seed for them to consume by noon everyday to minimize rodent, squirrel and white winged dove attention.

One of my favorite foods to provide to the birds is suet. In the old days we fed pure beef suet that the butchers gave us, now we used packaged suet. In addition to the beef fat, they usually include some type of flavoring such as orange or peanut and include some seed filler. The suet attracts insect eaters such as kinglets, wrens, woodpeckers, mockingbirds, and even a few types of warblers.

As part of your winter-feeding package include water. Birdbaths rinsed and refilled every day will bring in 8 to 10 different species every day. Add a drip or recirculating mechanism and even more species will visit the water sources. Our recirculating 50-gallon pond is where we see the indigo buntings painted buntings, orioles and warblers every migration period.

Speaking of migration action, now is a great time to expect 3 types of migrating hummingbirds (black-chinned, rufous, and ruby-throated) to visit your landscape, especially if you have one or more sugar water feeder to complement fall nectar producers such as porter weed, cape honeysuckle, lantana, zinnias, salvias, duranta and Mexican flame vine.