

Birds in the Landscape

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If you have water sources available to the birds, especially if the sources include a re-circulating mechanism, you have probably experienced many bird species taking advantage of its availability during this period of drought. In addition to the resident cardinals, blue jays, wrens, titmice, lesser goldfinches, doves, and golden fronted woodpeckers, gardeners are reporting visits by migrating orioles, buntings, robins, and warblers.

The migrating hummingbirds are also moving through town with frequent stops at sugar water feeders and nectar plants such as zinnias, porter weed, salvias, flame acanthus, cape honeysuckle, firebush, pentas, Turks cap and shrimp plant. It is common for 3 species of hummingbird to be filling up on sugar water and nectar during migration (black-chinned, ruby throated and rufous) The little rufous hummingbird is the most aggressive and independent of the migrants. It is common for individual rufous hummingbirds to settle into a favored San Antonio landscape for the winter.

It is not too late to add a bird bath with a solar operated recirculating pump, and the migrating hummingbirds will be seeking available sugar water feeders at least until December, but it is also the ideal time to start feeding the seed eating birds.

To thwart the squirrels and white-winged doves center your feeding program on a steel feeder with weight sensitive perches such are available from the "Absolute" brand. Distribute the favored oil sunflower seeds through this type feeder. Cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, titmice and other relatively light weight species will be able to take advantage of the weight -sensitive perches.

American and lesser goldfinches will be attracted to a tube feeder with slit openings that are built especially for thistle seed. Tube feeders with slightly larger seed openings are available for safflower seed. It is a favorite of house finches and other seed eaters but is passed up by the squirrels.

In terms of efficiency it is usually best to offer a single seed variety in each feeder, but it does work well to offer a mixed seed that includes millet on a low tray for ground feeders such as Inca doves and American sparrows. Only put out enough seed for the birds to eat up by early afternoon so it doesn't attract rodents at night.

To open a whole new type of birds to your landscape feeding program, consider feeding suet. In years past you could obtain chunks of beef fat from your butcher and offer it to the birds. It was attractive to insect-eating species such as woodpeckers, mockingbirds, wrens, kinglets, and even warbler species. Now suet is much easier to use. Wild bird supply sources offer convenient sized blocks of suet flavored with fruit, grain, and insects that fit in special square mesh feeders to offer to the birds. Pepper flavored suet is even available on the market. The birds aren't affected by the hot pepper flavor, but squirrels do not like the taste.

One of the most important reasons to feed the birds is so you can observe them feeding. Bird feeders can be places on poles, but it is usually easier to hang them from eaves, trellises, or branches that are visible from a convenient window from the house. They also are most pleasurable if they are easy to reach and refill. The tube and suet feeders work especially well when hung from the eaves or a trellis.

The bulkier steel feeders require a sturdy horizontal branch of a shade tree or plant like vitex. The platform feeder can be placed in an open area in the vicinity of the main feeder.