

## Feeding Birds in Winter

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Feeding songbirds in your backyard can be a year-round activity, but most people, including beginners, maintain bird feeders only during the colder months of the year. Winter is an ideal time to attract birds to your backyard since many natural sources of food such as insects and fruit are in short supply or non-existent in winter. Additionally, songbirds that do not migrate to warmer climates shift their dietary preferences to include a variety of seeds including those commonly offered in a bird feeder.

Resident birds such as chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers start to seek out winter feeding areas as early as September. Maintaining a bird feeder before the cold weather of winter arrives ensures the best chance of attracting birds; however, new feeders can be established with great success at any time during winter. The key to any new bird feeder is patience. It may take a while for birds in your area to recognize the new food source available to them.

Beginning bird feeding enthusiasts are advised to start small – one feeder, one food. Most songbirds prefer black-oil sunflower seeds offered in a tube or hopper-style bird feeder. The seed and both feeder styles are readily available from retail stores. A bird feeder should be placed where it is easily observable from a window in your home. It should also be located approximately 10 feet from any trees or shrubs to allow the birds quick access to safety from predators, as well as inhibiting the ability of a squirrel to leap onto your feeder from surrounding vegetation. A squirrel baffle may also be needed to thwart squirrels that climb onto your feeder.

Once you've established a regular crowd at your feeder, you might consider offering another type of bird feeder or food. Simple additions to your new feeding station may include a different feeder offering the same black oil sunflower seeds, suet cakes offered in a suet cage, or a thistle feeder and seed to attract finches. A heated bird bath is also very appealing to birds that may spend a lot of energy looking for unfrozen water during the winter. Finally, keep the health and safety of your birds in mind by cleaning feeders and bird baths periodically with a 10% bleach solution.

Winter bird feeding can be a fun and rewarding endeavor. Share the experience by including others and watching the birds together.

### References:

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