

A BACKYARD FOR THE BIRDS

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
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M My birdfeeders are a tremendous source of home entertainment. I fancy myself as the Scandinavian Snow White, attracting as much wildlife as I can to my suburban property. The normally barren winter landscape comes alive en masse with the cheerful sights and sounds of assorted songbirds. Attracting feathered friends to your backyard can be as simple as setting out a feeder, but persons who follow the guidelines below will be rewarded with a multitude and variety of bird life!

The Comforts of Home

Birds need a setting that mimics their natural environment to feel safe. Generous amounts of trees and tall shrubs (especially evergreens) are essential for shelter and concealment as they flit from tree to tree in approach of a feeder. Native varieties can also provide food and nesting opportunities. Fowl favourites are: cedar, white spruce, pine, hemlock, cherry, serviceberry, oak, elderberry and honeysuckle.

When taking care of garden maintenance, don't keep things too neat and tidy as birds prefer a naturalistic setting. Designate a rough area and build a brush pile for ground-dwelling birds. Leave those spent blooms of Echinacea and Black-eyed Susans

standing, and they'll provide a natural food source. And when raking fallen foliage, leave some under your trees, and they will be a magnet for insect-eating fowl. Dry leaves double as nesting material as well!

A bird paradise needs a water source, and garden ponds and birdbaths are ideal watering holes. Water will draw all sorts of bird species that don't eat feeder fare. Place them near shrubs with dense branching so the birds have a safe place to dry off when they are wet and vulnerable. Watering in the winter proves a difficult conundrum. A practical solution is to put out a fresh tray of warm water at the same time every day. The birds will quickly learn your routine and adapt. *Continued on page 38*



gardening

The Feeder

The ideal bird feeder is sturdy enough to withstand winter, tight enough to keep seeds dry and easy to dismount for important cleaning purposes. It is also best to only fill enough food to be consumed within a day or two to avoid feed moulding/spoilage. Mould creates toxins that are fatal to birds. Therefore, all bird feeders should be frequently cleaned.

Platform Feeders

- They attract the widest variety of seed-eating birds but also attract squirrels and chipmunks. Place a baffle on the chain or pole if squirrel feeding is undesirable. These feeders do get dirty as the birds stand on their food while eating, causing fecal contamination. Clean the platform bottom frequently to keep it sanitary.
- Window feeders entice smaller bird species, but like the platform feeder, it also needs constant cleaning due to fecal food pollution. Luckily, they are easy to access and bring the birds up-close for your enjoyment.



- Hopper/House feeders can look great and offer convenience in that they can hold enough seed to last for several days. Unfortunately, the seed within can be prone to mould and spoilage.
- Tube feeders often attract smaller birds while excluding larger, more aggressive species. Similar to hoppers, they can hold enough seed to last for several days.
- Suet feeders can provide life-sustaining and high-quality calories during a harsh winter. Put out only enough to be consumed in a day, and you will also avoid attracting skunks and raccoons.

The Fare

- Black oil sunflower seeds provide nourishment to a broad range of bird species, but by offering Nyjer seed, Safflower seed, suet and various fruits and nuts, an even wider range will result. Mixed seed blends can be problematic as aggressive wildlife, such as Grackles and squirrels will quickly empty a feeder looking for a favourite food inside. By offering multiple feeders with different food in each, you will reap maximum bird benefit while reducing waste.

Location, Location, Location

- Place your feeding station close to evergreen trees or shrubs, but far away from the reflection of windows. Or set directly on the window frame or affix to the glass to avoid bird window fatality. By moving the feeder placement periodically, you reduce the risk of contagion under the bird's feeders where waste builds up. Many birds are ground feeders and just as the feeder needs housekeeping, so does the area below the feeder.

- It is a common misconception that by feeding the birds year round it will disrupt their migration. In Canada, we have many bird species that stay year round and could use your assistance for winter survival. Give them an extra helping hand by installing a roosting box or two, thus protecting them from frigid seasonal temperatures. Also stay tuned for The Story of the Hummingbird, coming soon to an OUR HOMES summer issue near you! **OH**

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FOWL FACTS

- By attracting birds your yard will also greatly reduce pest insect populations as most birds (and some exclusively) eat insects.
- A bird-friendly yard is one without chemical pesticide and herbicide. These chemicals get injected into the food chain and harm our bird populations, but sadly the worst scourge affecting fowl is household felines killing up to 3.5 billion per year in North America alone.
- Be cautious when cutting your lawn or pruning vegetation. If you do find a nest, have patience. It only takes about two weeks for the babies to hatch and fly away!
- Never offer birds bread crumbs or other baked goods. They are especially prone to mould and also don't provide the proper nutrition.
- A number of factors trigger the urge for birds to migrate, but the most significant one is day length.

