

## **FEEDING BIRDS**

As winter approaches, birds that stay the winter in Michigan can use some help with supplemental feeding. Michigan State University Extension recommends that now is the time to prepare for feeding birds so that it is enjoyable for you and good for the birds.

According to Wikipedia, over 55 million Americans feed wild birds. Bird feeding provides many enjoyable opportunities to watch and learn about the habits, behaviors and life cycles of birds.

There are a few steps to take to get started when beginning to feed birds. If you are using used feeders, make sure they are clean and free of bird droppings. Scrubbing them prior to use with a weak bleach solution will help eliminate any harmful bacteria that birds can carry. Location is an important decision both for the birds and for your viewing pleasure. Having nearby shrubs and trees that provide cover for birds allows them more security to approach feeders. Placing feeders in a prominent location for viewing is desirable but not always practical. Choose a site that is good for birds and where they can be viewed for pleasure.

Making your feeder squirrel proof is a daunting challenge! If you don't protect them, you will lose a lot of seed to the feeding squirrels. Baffles, hanging wires and other ingenious contraptions have been used to deter squirrels. Try various options, as squirrels will try the unthinkable when trying to get a free meal. This can be entertaining and frustrating at the same time.

The types of birds you attract will largely depend on the type of feeder and seed you select. Small tube shape feeders with pegs are great for finches, sparrows, chickadees and nuthatches. Feeders with a ledge will accommodate cardinals, blue jays, grosbeaks and other medium to larger birds. Black sunflower seeds are a good all-around choice for most birds. Chickadees, nuthatches, blue jays and juncos are frequent visitors to feeders with sunflower seeds. Thistle is a great choice to attract a variety of finches but the cost can be prohibitive and thistle seed requires a special feeder. Mixes containing millet, sunflower, corn and oats may look appealing but often birds will eat only the sunflower and push away the other "filler" seeds. A Suet feeder is a great addition, adding a tremendous energy and nutritional source for birds.

The Kellogg Biological Station run by Michigan State University provides tips on bird feeding and offers many birding experiences at the station. Consider a bird hike or create your bird feeding station right in your backyard! It is a fun and rewarding activity that the whole family will enjoy.

Ref: MSU Extension, Winter is Bird feeding Time

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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