

Winter Bird Feeding

It is that time of year when the weather is getting colder, the leaves are down and the Holiday season has begun. The garden is bedded down for the winter, the deck furniture cleaned and covered, and the car's window washer fluid tank is full. It is time to set up the feeders and entice my feathered friends to entertain me for the next 6 months. If you would enjoy watching birds this winter, set up a feeder or two or three! Here are some things to consider. Provide a variety of feeders. There are many sizes of tube, hopper and platform feeders which are good for seed mixes, sunflower or thistle. Black oil sunflower is a favorite of most backyard birds. If you buy a seed mix, avoid one with milo and rape seeds that birds don't eat. Save your money! Cracked corn, white proso millet, peanuts and a lot of sunflower makes a good mix. Some birds feed from perches but some prefer a platform or the ground so sprinkle some seed on a railing, table or in a pie pan on the ground. Finches and juncos like thistle (nyjer) served up in a tube with tiny holes that lets the birds pick out a seed at a time. Such a feeder with a bottom tray can catch seeds that might otherwise be dropped. Suet feeders are especially attractive to woodpeckers, but I've had jays, cardinals, nuthatches, chickadees and robins feed on suet as well. Years ago I would render suet myself, but now I purchase formed cakes. It costs a bit more but is quick and easy. Sometimes I put out bits of fruit which I see a few birds, as well as squirrels, consume. If squirrels are pests, distract them by placing ear corn away from your feeders. Space your feeders around so that all are visible and the birds aren't crowded. Keep your feeders clean; wet, moldy seed is not palatable and could be dangerous to the birds. If possible, provide fresh water. You can buy heated, ice free water trays or you can use any shallow, freeze hardy container and empty out the ice and refill with fresh water when necessary. Cover for shelter is an asset for the birds... and their predators! On more than one occasion I have had a Coopers Hawk try to snatch a meal from my feeders. Hang feeders in a clear area so the birds can see what is lurking, but near shrubs or trees where they can seek cover when needed. Picture windows, while convenient for viewing, can be fatal to birds. Placing your feeders close enough to the windows that the birds cannot reach top speed may prevent some deadly hits. I put decals of a falcon on each of my windows. It helps, but does not eliminate the problem. Screens work well; the birds bounce off. For the daily five minutes of effort and the monthly 30 minutes for thorough cleaning, feeding the birds returns hours of entertainment and enjoyment; better than a DVD, almost as good as a novel and far better than housework!

If you don't feed birds at home, stop by Bull's Run. We have a birding trail and several dedicated volunteers who keep our feeders full. We feed black oil sunflower and suet for the birds, ear corn for the squirrels. The raccoons eat it all! And please, if you see vandalism, let us know. Many thanks to Bob Wise for rebuilding all our feeders which vandals destroyed last year. The feeders are up and active! Check it out during daylight hours. Also, we invite you to join us on Saturday December 16th for our annual bird count.