

Backyard Bird Feeding

with Jeni Williams

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Basics for Backyard Bird Feeding

- ✓ Cover/Shelter
- ✓ Variety of Food
- ✓ Water Source

Cover/Shelter

Place birdfeeders near trees or shrubs so that birds have easy access to shelter in the event of inclement weather or predators. Create feeding stations but be careful not to oversaturate an area with too many feeders. Trees and shrubs also provide excellent nesting habitats for our feathered friends.

Variety of Food

Consider feeding more than one type of seed. Different species of birds desire different types of seeds. Select feeders that accommodate the type of seeds you wish to feed. Place feeders at varying heights to appeal to all types of birds. Make sure to clean feeders regularly to help prevent the spread of disease.

Water Source

Birds need water to survive year round and the winter months are most difficult for our feathered friends. Consider purchasing a heated birdbath or be diligent about making sure you provide fresh water several times a day during the winter months. Make sure to clean birdbaths on a regular basis and keep water fresh so that a harmful bacterium doesn't grow.



Black-capped Chickadee on a suet and fruit ball

Bird Friendly Plantings

If you're looking for plantings to entice birds to your backyard, check out some of my suggestions. All of the mentioned trees/shrubs and plants produce either fruit, nuts or seeds that provide food for birds at different times of the year.

Trees/Shrubs

- *Serviceberry
- *Winterberry
- *American Mountain Ash
- *Pagoda Dogwood
- *Ninebark
- *Pussy willow
- *Mulberry
- *Crabapple
- *White Oak
- *Eastern Red Cedar
- Northern Bayberry
- *Staghorn Sumac
- *Nannyberry
- *American Plum
- *Elderberry

Plants

- Coneflowers
- *Black-eyed Susan
- *Butterfly Milkweed
- *Common Milkweed
- *Common Yarrow
- Sunflowers
- *Liatris



Male American Goldfinch eating coneflower seeds

*Denotes native Michigan plantings. By planting native plants you encourage native insects that will feed on these plants, which in turn will attract birds and encourage them to nest in the area. Planting native plants is also smart; these plants are proven to thrive in your area and require less care.



Female Baltimore Oriole on a Torch Lily



Picking the Right Feeder

Feeder selection is key when it comes to backyard birding. Make sure to select a feeder that will withstand the brutal Michigan winters and our pesky squirrels, the ability to keep seed dry, and one that's easy to clean and assemble. There are several basic feeder types to consider. I've outlined each feeder and which types of seeds the feeder is suited for below.

Hooper Feeders – these feeders can be easily mounted to a pole or suspended from a bracket or tree branch. Hooper feeders hold a fair amount of seed so they are convenient for people. You do have to be careful to check the feeder to make sure the feeder hasn't allowed moisture to penetrate and saturate the food; this could lead to seed spoilage, which is extremely dangerous for the bird's health. Typical seeds used in hopper feeders are a birdseed mix, black oil sunflower and safflower.

Tray or Platform Feeders – these types of feeders offer no protection from the weather and without proper drainage could result in food spoilage; it's important to only place enough food in the tray/platform feeder that will be eaten within one to two days. Tray/platform feeders can be suspended from branches, mounted to poles or they can even be sat on tree stumps, rocks, deck railings, etc. These feeders also attract squirrels, deer, raccoons, turkeys and chipmunks. Typical seeds used in tray/platform feeders are a birdseed mix, black oil sunflower, corn and nuts.

Tube Feeders – tube feeders are hollow feeders that have perches attached to them. These feeders are typically hung from tree branches or brackets. Seeds typically used in tube feeders are Nyger/thistle seed and millet.

Suet Feeders – suet feeders are usually constructed of wire mesh or plastic coated wire mesh. These feeders can be nailed to a tree trunk, suspended from branches with chains or rope, or sometimes hopper feeders have cages affixed to their sides for suet cakes. Suet cakes are used in suet feeders. Cakes come in all different flavors from fruit, hot pepper, and nut lovers. I prefer to make my own suet; you will find the recipe on the back of this handout.



Bluejay on a platform feeder

Attracting Your Feathered Friends

The birds listed below are common birds found year-round in Michigan. This brochure focuses on winter backyard birding. I hope to put together a brochure on spring and summer birding in the near future.

Bird	Seeds/Nuts	Fruit	Insects	Suet
American Goldfinch	X			
Black-capped Chickadee	X	X	X	X
Blue Jay	X	X	X	X
Cedar Waxwing		X	X	
Dark-eyed Junco	X		X	
Downy Woodpecker	X	X	X	X
Hairy Woodpecker	X	X	X	X
House Finch	X	X	X	
House Sparrow	X		X	
Mourning Dove	X			
Northern Cardinal	X	X	X	
Northern Flicker		X	X	X
Nuthatch	X	X	X	X
Pileated Woodpecker			X	X
Pine Siskin	X			
Red-bellied Woodpecker	X	X	X	X
Red-headed Woodpecker	X	X	X	X
Ring-necked Pheasant	X	X	X	
Tufted Titmouse	X		X	X
Wild Turkey	X	X	X	

I find that I prefer purchasing my seed from Family Farm & Home. I am in no way affiliated with Family Farm & Home and do not receive any kind of compensation from them for my preference in their store and Armada seeds. I like purchasing from them due to the quality and value of their seed. I can purchase 40# of birdseed mix on sale for \$7.99 and 40# of black oil sunflower seeds for \$13.99 on sale. I diligently feed the birds during the winter months and make my own suet, which can get rather expensive with the amounts that I go through.

Suet Recipe

- 1.5 pounds of beef lard
- 2 cups birdseed mix
- 2 cups black oil sunflower seeds
- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup dried fruit
- 1 cup raw peanuts

Cut the beef lard up into 1 inch cubes and melt over low heat in a heavy skillet or dutch oven. While lard is melting, combine dry ingredients in a mixing bowl and set aside. You can also melt the suet in a crockpot on high heat until it's melted.

Once the lard is melted and the cracklings (the byproduct of the lard) are a golden color, strain out the cracklings with a slotted spoon or strain through a metal strainer. Once cracklings are removed, mix the dry ingredients into the melted suet and pour into your desired molds.

I use the plastic suet cake molds that I have kept from purchasing store bought suet. I also have logs that I've bored holes in that I fill with the suet mixture. I have a woodpecker tree that I've made and I fill small plastic cups with the suet mixture to create suet plugs for the tree. I've also filled a coffee cup with the mixture and placed a stick in it so once it hardens the birds can perch on the stick and eat the suet.

There are endless possibilities for creating suet cakes for your feathered friends. Cakes should be stored in the freezer until ready to use.



Suet plugs used
in my
woodpecker
tree



Suet filled coffee cup

Notes:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to learn more about backyard birding. I am extremely passionate about birding and providing the best environment that I can for my feathered friends. My love of birding was bestowed upon me at a young age by my Grandpa Stevenson. It's something that I've grown to appreciate more as I get older and I love to teach the next generations of Stevenson children, the joys of birding.

I hope you take the knowledge you've learned and apply it to your own backyard. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to reach out to me via email at xillsmom@gmail.com. I do have a blog that I update and would love for you to check it out. You can find it at www.jenithebirdnerd.com.

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