

Attract Birds To Feeders

EBENSBURG (Cambria Co.) — Homeowners can feed birds all year long," said Margaret Brittingham, associate professor of wildlife resources. "However, it can become expensive, and most birds will find more than enough food in the wild during the summer."

Brittingham said homeowners should realize that a single bird feeder will not attract every bird in their landscape. Birds with distinct feeding habits will be attracted to markedly different feeders.

• Platform feeders. These simple feeders often are nothing more than a pile of seed on a flat board. More elaborate models have a roof. Ground-feeding birds such as cardinals, sparrows, and juncos prefer platform feeders.

"The drawback to platform feeders is that food often is exposed to the elements and can be soiled by droppings," Brittingham said.

• Hopper Feeders. These feeders fill from the top and seed flow down to the bottom where the birds can remove them. Some types hang and feature

perches. These feeders attract the greatest diversity of birds because they are used by birds that prefer platform feeders along with ones that use hanging feeders.

• Hanging Feeders. Shaped like a tube, this style features small perches, attracting smaller birds such as chickadees, titmice and finches.

• Suet Feeders. Suet feeders offer suet, a type of animal fat, in a wire box or basket. These can be hung or placed on a platform. They attract a variety of birds, especially woodpeckers, chickadees, wrens, titmice and nuthatches.

• Thistle feeders. Thistle seeds are very small. This tubular feeder attracts mainly finches.

Brittingham said the menu homeowners offer birds is crucial for attracting a diversity of birds. She recommends several types of feed.

• Black Oil Sunflower Seeds. Eaten by large and small bird species, this seed is the best all-around feeding seed, Brittingham said. Finches, nuthatches, titmice and chickadees will use

this feed. The larger, striped sunflower seed will attract blue jays and cardinals.

• Seed Mixes. Brittingham warns homeowners that some inexpensive seed mixes contain large amounts of seed that birds do not eat. "Birds dislike grains like millet, milo, hulled oats and rice," she said. "It seems cheaper, but it's more expensive in the long run because the birds are just tossing it on the ground."

Brittingham recommends buying seed mixes at a garden supply store or pet store.

If homeowners do not want to feed year-round, Brittingham suggests putting bird feeders out in October. "You can start in September if you want to attract some of the songbirds that migrate through Pennsylvania," she added.

Homeowners should feed through the winter and spring. She said migratory songbirds may come to feeders if food is provided through May. Brittingham suggested placing a variety of feeder types to lure a wide range of bird species.

"You should place feeders close enough that you can see

birds through a window, but far enough away that you aren't bothered by discarded seeds and bird droppings," Brittingham said.

Homeowners shouldn't feel the need to constantly refill their feeders when the supply runs low. Brittingham said past research projects revealed that birds get about 20 percent of their food needs from bird feeders. "Birds depend mainly on their natural habitat for food," she said. "Feeders are a supplement to their diet."

Brittingham said many birds remain loyal to their favorite feeders, returning year after year. She emphasized that homeowners should remember a few tips to keep birds coming back for more.

• Place the feeder less than 20 feet away from cover, such as

trees, shrubs, or brush so birds will feel protected when feeding.

• Provide a water source, such as a fountain or birdbath, if there is no natural water source nearby.

• If a home's windows are highly reflective, birds may fly into them, particularly if trees are reflected in the windows. Brittingham suggested hanging garden netting, which is fine enough to be nearly transparent, yet protects birds from injuries.

"Once you decide what types of feeders to use, you just have to wait for the birds to come," Brittingham said. "If you're just starting to feed birds, I'd suggest buying a good field guide so you can identify the birds. You don't have to buy binoculars, but they do help you see details that you wouldn't normally get to see."

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