

Winter Birding

One of the most pervasive misconceptions about backyard birding is that hardly any birds hang around in winter. Savvy birders, of course, know that the coldest months can be some of the hottest for backyard action. The key is to know which birds winter in your area and to prepare your yard to meet their needs as temperatures drop.

In winter, birds require foods with more oil and higher calorie content so they can store fat to survive colder temperatures. Providing easy meals is the top way to attract winter birds to your yard in winter, and will help to increase the birds' chances of survival through winter. A well-fed bird is a warmer bird, and will therefore be much more likely to withstand winter rigors.

Most birds that stay in cold regions through winter eat primarily seeds. (Since insects are hard to find in freezing weather.) Here is a selection of seeds that attract a wide variety of birds:

Black oil sunflower seeds

The most popular winter seed is usually sunflower seed. It has a high oil content that is nutritionally important for birds, and a thin seed coat that is easy for them to crack open. If you are only going to provide one seed, this is the one to choose.

Get black sunflower seeds, sometimes called oil seeds, rather than the grey-and-white-striped sunflower seeds sold for people to eat. Black sunflower seeds are higher in oil content, softer shelled, and cheaper. It's always a good idea to put most of your sunflower seeds in hanging feeders, as the seed is much safer from squirrels and raccoons that way.

Nyjer

Due to its oil and high caloric content, Nyjer is especially popular as a winter bird food. The protein in Nyjer is also useful for regenerating feathers when birds molt in the late fall and early spring.

Buy a hanging tube with tiny holes, designed specifically for nyjer. Hang it where you can see it from your best viewing window.



Suet

Birds love suet! Suet is the solid fat rendered from beef and venison. It is a high energy, pure fat substance which is invaluable in winter when insects are harder to find and birds need many more calories to keep their bodies warm. Suet is an excellent source of concentrated energy to help birds make it through freezing winter days and nights. Always hang suet, so as not to attract mammals.

All of these seed options are currently available in the Birding section of the Nursery, as well as a wide selection of feeders for each seed type. With Christmas approaching, bird feeders and birding supplies are great gift ideas that will continue to provide enjoyment long after the holiday season has passed.

Happy Winter Birding!

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