

United Field Ornithologists of Roswell

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FEEDING THE BIRDS IN YOUR BACKYARD

If you want birds to visit your backyard you need to provide them with three basic necessities: Food, water, and shelter.

The following will address the first necessity, food. Most yards will provide at least some natural food from the trees, flowers, and plants that grow there. To encourage more and varied birds, add one or more feeders to provide additional feed for them. There are five basic types of feeders used in most yards to attract birds. These are: platform, seed hoppers, tube seed feeders, suet feeders, and nectar feeders. I have listed each of them below with what type of feed they use, and some of the birds that might choose that particular feeder.

PLATFORM: This can be as simple as a board on a poll, or with a chain or rope to hang it from your tree. There are commercial platform feeders to be had as well. Many times this type of feeder is used for kitchen scraps such as bread crusts, fruit scraps and peelings, most left overs. They are also good for peanuts (which attract titmice, chickadees, nuthatches, and starlings.) If a small lip is added around the edge it will prevent some of the food from falling to the ground. Any seed mix will also work on these feeders. Most all birds will come to a platform feeder providing there is no cover close for predators. (ie house cats).

SEED HOPPERS: These hold most of the basic seed mixes, sunflower seeds, and cracked corn. Some of them have flat bottoms, some have perches, and some have a mechanism which will close the feed shut if any of the larger birds try to feed on them. This feeder is good for most of your smaller seed eating birds.

TUBE SEED-FEEDERS: The size of the feeder holes will determine what type of feed to use on these feeders. Some of them will have a wire type basket around the outside to prevent the larger birds from eating the seed. The tube feeder with very small feed ports are for Thistle seed which attracts the tiny goldfinches, and pine siskins. Staggered perches on these allow many birds to feed at the same time. These can be hung or mounted on a post. There is another type of feeder for the goldfinches, which is a mesh bag filled with thistle seed. The finches can cling to the mesh while feeding. The tube feeder with larger ports can have any regular seed in them.

SUET. Commercial suet feeders are made of wire and hold a block of suet which often has some seeds added. To keep squirrels from eating all of your suet buy the type that has red hot pepper added to it. Most birds appreciate some suet in their diet. Woodpeckers especially like suet.

NECTAR. These are usually sold as hummingbird feeders, however Oriole feeders also hold nectar. Besides hummingbirds, house finches and orioles like nectar. Oriole's also love oranges.

Grain and seed to use in the feeders are: sunflower seed, white millet, cracked corn, thistle seed, and commercial wild bird seed mix. Some birds will eat almost anything, others are quite fussy.

All feeders should be kept clean. Use a solution of soapy water with a little household bleach to clean them, and rinse well.