

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society's Tips on Feeding Birds in Your Backyard



Where to feed: Place your feeder in a quiet area where it is easy to see and convenient to refill. The feeder should be close to natural cover such as trees or shrubs, which offer refuge to birds as they wait their turn to feed. Evergreens are ideal; they provide thick foliage that will hide birds from predators and buffer winter winds. If the seed in the feeder is blowing out or getting wet, your birds are probably getting the same treatment. Try moving the feeder to a calmer, more sheltered spot.

Be careful not to place feeders too close to cover, however, as nearby branches can provide good jump-off points for squirrels that may be eyeing the seeds, or for cats that may be eyeing the birds! A distance of about 10 feet seems to be a good compromise, but try experimenting. You can provide resting and escape cover for ground-dwelling birds, such as Song Sparrows, by placing loosely stacked brush piles near your feeders.

If no birds visit your feeder within a few days of setting it up, try sprinkling seeds on the ground nearby to make the feeder more obvious.

What to feed: The variety of bird seeds and mixtures on the market is staggering. In most locations, however, the best all-around attractant is black-oil sunflower seed. This seed has a high meat-to-shell ratio; it is high in fat; and its small size and thin shell make it easy for small birds to handle and crack. (Striped sunflower seeds are larger and have thicker seed coats.)

Suet is a good choice for attracting insect-eating birds such as nuthatches and woodpeckers. Most suet is beef kidney fat, which is inexpensive and available at many meat counters. Suet also can be purchased as processed cake that includes seeds, berries, and other ingredients. Be careful if you offer suet in hot weather; it may become rancid if it has not been specially processed.

Don't forget the water! Birds require water to drink in addition to the moisture they may get from food sources. A small birdbath or water feature will act as a magnet for birds—often attracting species that would otherwise not be seen.

Seed Preferences of Common Feeder Birds

	Chickadees	Nuthatches	Finches	Cardinals & Grosbeaks	Sparrows & Blackbirds	Jays	Woodpeckers	Titmice	Pigeons & Doves
Sunflower	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Safflower		X	X	X				X	
Cracked Corn					X	X			X
Nyjer (Thistle)			X						
Suet	X	X				X	X	X	