

Backyard Birdfeeders

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New Jersey's wildlife diversity is exceptional and includes over 400 species of birds. Birdfeeders can provide an exciting opportunity to view the amazing array of bird species found in the Garden State. All birds need food, water, cover, and space. These four components, collectively known as habitat, are essential for survival. By including birdfeeders in backyard landscapes, homeowners can enjoy hours of bird watching while also offering birds a year-round source of food. This fact sheet will assist landowners in attracting New Jersey's birds to their yards by discussing types of feeders for offering an assortment of seeds.

Things to consider:

There are many types of birdfeeders. Whether you build one or buy one, there are some things to keep in mind:

Feeding station: Birds should get the food you provide them from birdfeeders. Although some birds such as doves and juncos prefer to feed on the ground, you may wish to refrain from throwing seed directly on the ground because it could present a health hazard for the birds you attract. Food that sits on the ground can be contaminated in several ways, including dampness, bacteria, mold, animal feces, fertilizers, and pesticides. Placing a feeding platform off the ground can reduce exposure to contaminants.

Location: Place the feeder in a location where it is easily seen for bird watching and easily accessible for filling and cleaning. Several small feeders placed at various locations, rather than only one large feeder, may prove better for bird diversity and reduce aggression. Feeders should also be located near protective cover or other areas where escape from predators is readily available. Don't be discouraged if birds don't immediately utilize your feeders once you've placed them in a suitable location. It may take up to a month for birds to locate new food sources.

Squirrel prevention: Squirrels can quickly become a problem by taking over feeders and replacing birds. Place your feeder in an area where it is difficult for squirrels to gain access. If possible, hang feeders at least 8 feet from tree limbs, roof overhangs, or other squirrel perches. Another approach may be to utilize "squirrel-proof" feeders. For example, a pole-mounted feeder with a baffle (a round or umbrella-shaped barrier that squirrels cannot climb over) placed on the pole at least 4 feet above the ground, but below the feeder, may prove effective. Furthermore, you may want to consider a "squirrel-proof" feeder, constructed from steel, that consists of a perching platform that closes access to seed in the feeder under the weight of a squirrel but not birds. A tube feeder surrounded by a grid of vinyl-coated wire is another feeder design that has been successful in preventing squirrels from replacing birds. Additionally, squirrels will often damage or destroy feeders by chewing on them. Purchasing a feeder made of durable materials such as heavy plastic or metal can reduce chewing damage and extend the life of your feeder. Keep in mind that there are no foolproof methods for keeping squirrels away and you may need to adjust your strategy as you, and the squirrels, gain experience.

Maintenance: Feeders should be cleaned on a regular basis. If not maintained, wet seed and bird feces on the feeder and ground beneath can be a breeding ground for diseases such as *Salmonella enteritidis*. Frequency of cleaning will depend on the style of feeder. Hummingbird feeders should be cleaned 2–3 times per week. Platform feeders should be cleaned 2 times per month. Thistle, sunflower, and suet feeders should be cleaned once per month. Plastic, ceramic, and glass feeders can be washed in a container of hot soapy water with a capful or two of bleach and then run through a dishwasher. Wood feeders can be cleaned in the same manner but use a disinfectant other than bleach so the color does not fade.



Time of year: Although many people put out feeders at the first sign of cold weather in the fall, bird feeding can begin at any time of the year and continue year-round. The types of birds attracted to feeders will change with the seasons. Some birds are year-round residents while others are migrants and are only present during the winter or summer months. Also, food preferences change over the course of the year.

Water and Grit: These materials are not sources of food but are needed by many species of birds. Water is used for both drinking and bathing. Providing water will also allow birds to conserve energy during the cold winter months by saving them a flight to a natural source. A small heater can be added to a birdbath to keep the water from freezing.

Birds require grit for digestion of food. Grit helps to grind food in the bird's gizzard. Although sandy sidewalks and roadsides are often sources of grit, many birds will accept grit if offered in addition to food. Coarse sand and broken oyster shells are suitable choices. Grit should never be mixed with seed because birds need to regulate the amount of grit they require.

Seeds: Seeds will go bad if they get damp or wet and can become a health hazard for birds. Although many ceramic, plastic, metal, and wood feeders keep seeds dry, rain can get in through the feeding portals, so feeders with drainage holes in the feeder hopper and seed tray should be used. Birds prefer fresh, good quality seed. Several types of seed are available but black-oil sunflower seeds are the most widely preferred and have a high-energy content. The higher the oil content, the higher the fat content, and the higher the energy content.

Types of birdfeeders and bird food:

Birds have specific food preferences, mostly determined by the shape and size of their beak. Most feeders are designed to accommodate a particular beak shape and size. The type of feeder you set out will dictate to a large extent the type of birds you will attract to your backyard. The following pictures show the range of available feeders.

Platform feeders are mounted on posts, windowsills, or set directly on the ground. They attract many species of bird, and are cheap and easy to build, maintain, and



fill. Seeds commonly placed in platforms include hulled sunflower seeds, broken sunflower hearts, oil-type sunflower seeds, safflower, thistle, mixed seeds, and nutmeats.

Traditional feeders are typically shaped like a box or small house, with a base, roof, and a plastic or glass hopper. An open space at the bottom of the hopper allows seeds to be gravity fed to the base. This type of feeder can be made from metal, plastic, or wood. They can be mounted on a post, fence, or hung from a tree limb. Traditional feeders attract many species of birds but also attract squirrels and a squirrel deterrent should be used. Seeds commonly placed in traditional feeders include hulled sunflower seeds, broken sunflower hearts, oil-type sunflower seeds, safflower, thistle, mixed seeds, and nutmeats.



Suet feeders can be constructed from a variety of materials. They can be as simple as a mesh bag hung from a tree limb or a wooden box with mesh hardware cloth. Suet is a high energy source of food. Woodpeckers in particular are attracted to suet feeders.



Log feeders are simply a 1–2 foot section of log, usually only a few inches in diameter. Small holes are dug out of the sides so that suet or peanut butter mixtures can be packed in.



The size of the holes and addition of perching pegs can determine and limit bird species that visit the feeder.

Tube and thistle sock feeders commonly consist of a clear plastic tube, evenly spaced holes, and pegs to facilitate perching. Similar to the log feeder, tube feeders offer seeds in



stead of suet or peanut butter mixtures. Seeds commonly placed in tube feeders include hulled sunflower seeds, broken sunflower hearts, oil-type sunflower seeds, safflower, thistle, mixed seeds, and nutmeats.

Thistle sock feeders are nothing more than a tube-like sleeve made of fine mesh. Small birds can cling to the mesh and help themselves to the tiny thistle seeds.

Hummingbird feeders consist of a plastic bottle with one or more funnel shaped, vibrantly colored, plastic flowers. They can be filled with nectar or sugar solutions.



Because these solutions spoil quickly, the feeder should be cleaned 2–3 times a week. To prevent bees and ants from competing with hummingbirds for the nectar or sugar solution, purchase hummingbird feeders that include bee and ant guards.

Nails can be used to impale ears of dried corn or fruits like oranges and apples that have been halved.



The following table provides examples of common backyard birds, food, feeder types, and placement of feeders. Although a range of foods are listed with associated bird species, you may notice that a particular species of bird may prefer certain foods over others.

Attracting Birds to Feeders

| Birds | Food | Feeder Types | Placement |
|--------------------|--|------------------|----------------------------------|
| American goldfinch | Hulled sunflower seeds, broken sunflower hearts, oil-type sunflower seeds, thistle, mixed seeds, nutmeats, suet, and sugar water | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground |
| pine siskins | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| redpolls | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Thistle sock | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Suet/log | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |

| Birds | Food | Feeder Types | Placement | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| black-capped chickadee | Black-striped and oil-type sunflower seeds, cracked unsalted nutmeats, peanut kernels, thistle, suet, and sugar water | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground | |
| Carolina chickadee | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| tufted titmouse | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| purple finch | | Thistle sock | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| red-breasted nuthatch | | Suet/log | | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| white-breasted nuthatch | | | | |
| blue jay | Black-striped, gray-striped and oil-type sunflower seeds, peanut kernels, mixed seeds, suet, fruit, and sugar water | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground | |
| | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| | | Thistle sock | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| | | Suet/log | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| | | Nail | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| evening grosbeak | Safflower and sunflower seeds | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground | |
| cardinal | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |

| Birds | Food | Feeder Types | Placement |
|--|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| mourning dove | German “golden” millet, milo, thistle, oil-type sunflower seeds, wheat, mixed seeds, nut meats, and red and white proso millet | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground |
| | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| dark-eyed junco chipping sparrow field sparrow fox sparrow song sparrow white-crowned sparrow white-throated sparrow | Red and white proso millet, sunflower, thistle, mixed seed, nut meats, and sugar water | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground |
| | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Thistle sock | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | Suet/log | At least 3-4 feet off the ground | |
| downy woodpecker hairy woodpecker red-bellied woodpecker | Sunflower seeds, suet, unsalted nutmeats, and fruit | Tray or platform | On or slightly above the ground |
| | | Traditional | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Tube | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |
| | | Suet/log | At least 3-4 feet off the ground |

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