

Feeding the Birds

Why we should feed our feathered friends - over the last 50 years the number of 'common' birds, such as sparrows and starlings, has steadily declined in the UK. There are several reasons for this including intensive agricultural practices, increased housing development and lack of winter food sources.

So what can you do? To make a difference it may be enough to simply set up a bird feeder in the garden - surveys have shown that this can help thousands of wild birds survive and raise their nestlings each year. In return, you get endless hours of amusement from observing the little visitors. By putting out a range of foods in different locations you can attract up to 50 species to your garden!

These are some of the most common birds to look out for in your garden -

- House sparrow
- Starling
- Blue tit
- Blackbird
- Chaffinch
- Collared dove
- Woodpigeon
- Great tit
- Robin
- Greenfinch



Robin

It is also worth looking out for siskins, long tailed tits, wrens, song thrushes, mistle thrushes, blackcaps and dunnocks. Regular visitors may also include crows and magpies.

What to Feed Them

Different birds need different foods, so it is good to provide a variety of food types. You may use a seed mix, available from most garden centres or pet shops, as well as any kitchen



Goldfinch

leftovers. Always make sure that you will not harm or poison the birds - choose bird food with BTO approval and avoid mouldy, dried or salted foods that are unhealthy for birds.

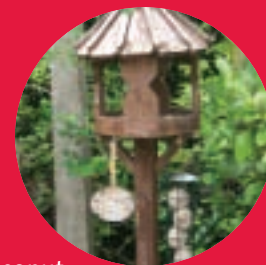
Healthy Food for Garden Birds

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Suet
- Overripe fruit (chopped)
- Dried fruit (soaked in water)
- Leftover cooked potatoes, rice or pasta (unsalted)
- Bacon rind (not too salty)
- Oatmeal
- Grated cheese
- Moist breadcrumbs
- Stale cake
- Bones with meat
- Mealworms
- Coconut halves
- Rowan and hawthorn berries (picked earlier and dried)
- And don't forget a regular supply of fresh water!

What to Avoid

- Salted food of any sort (chips, crisps, salted peanuts)
- Desiccated coconut - dried fruit swells up inside a bird's stomach
- Highly-spiced food
- Too much white bread or very dry bread
- Whole peanuts which can choke chicks in the summer

Why not make your own Bird Cake?



Step 1: Melt some fat and pour into a tub or a half coconut shell.

Step 2: Mix in any of the ingredients listed in the healthy food list and allow it to set.

Step 3: Hang it on a tree and watch the birds feast!

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When to feed them?

Although winter feeding is the most beneficial, birds may suffer from food shortages at any time of the year. Therefore, feeding is encouraged throughout spring and summer, as it can be helpful for birds during breeding period. While birds will always prefer 'wild' foods, what we put out for them at that time can especially help with the rearing of their chicks.

Where and how to feed them?

To maximise the number and diversity of birds visiting the garden, put out a variety of foods on the ground, in feeders, on bird tables and smeared in the cracks of trees. You can build your own bird table - simply nailing a flat piece of wood with a rim onto a post - or buy a ready-made one. You can use plastic bottles or empty milk cartons to make seed dispensers. You can be as creative as you wish - what is important to birds is a consistent supply of food. Once you start feeding, don't stop, as birds learn quickly and will count on you!



your garden with chemicals - let the birds help you with pest control!

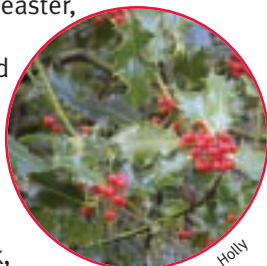
Natural food - planting for birds

To complement supplementary feeds, it is a good idea to grow plants that provide natural foods:

Berries - hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose, field rose, guelder rose, yew, holly, rowan, ivy, cotoneaster, pyracantha, honeysuckle, and mahonia are all great food sources.

Seeds - teasel, honesty, globe thistles, charlock, sunflowers, daisies, spindle, old man's beard, cosmos, goosefoot, forget-me-not, scabious, grasses all provide much appreciated seeds.

Some birds also feed on insects, caterpillars and snails, so don't spray



Great Tit

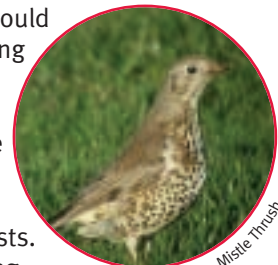
Helping nesting birds with bird boxes

While it is easy for birds to find nesting sites in the countryside, the urban environment may not provide enough places to nest. So why not help the birds by putting up nesting boxes? Bear in mind that there are specific designs for different kinds of birds.

Once you decide which species you would like to help, put the appropriate boxes at least 2.5m from the ground, preferably facing north, to avoid the full heat of the sun in spring and summer. Tits like to have lots of space around the boxes, while robins and wrens prefer to be hidden among leaves and branches. Proper timing is also important - the boxes should be put up in early to mid winter to give birds enough time to inspect and get used to the nests. In



autumn the boxes should be cleaned with boiling water to kill any parasites or fleas. You can also help the birds in their search for materials to build and insulate their nests. Try putting out nesting materials such as feathers, shredded woollen jumpers, pet hair, bundles of straw, grass or moss, but not cotton wool.



Mistle Thrush

By following some of these simple suggestions you will notice the amount and variety of birds in your garden increases dramatically. Just remember to keep going with the feeding once you start!

You can download more Make Space for Nature information guides from our website www.ulsterwildlifetrust.org or contact us on 028 44830282 or email info@ulsterwildlifetrust.org.