

## Bird Feeders and Birdhouses

**Type of Food** dictates what kind of bird feeder to use: (sunflower seed attracts the largest variety of birds)

- suet
- tiny seeds (thistle, Nyjer)
- large seeds, fruit pieces, or nuts (sunflower, safflower, raisins, peanuts, mix)
- fruit (apple, orange)
- nectar
- mealworms
- jelly

### Types of Feeders

Suet feeders – woodpecker, nuthatch, titmouse, chickadee

--Upside down



--Plug



Combo



--Standard



Seed and nut feeders – cardinal, wren, house finch, purple finch, grosbeak, blue jay, song sparrow wren, junco, goldfinch

--Hopper



--Platform/Tray



--Tube



--Gazebo



--Thistle



--Caged ("squirrel-proof")



Fruit, Nectar and Jelly – hummingbird, oriole

--Oriole



--Fruit and Jelly



--Fruit



--Hummingbird



Mealworms (can also be used with seeds, small fruit pieces, or nuts) – bluebird, robin, flicker



Specialty Feeders

--Window



--Copper Swirl



--Squirrel Flipper (motorized)



Photos from BestNest.com

Type of Bird	Food Preference
Blue Jays	Sunflower seed, safflower, cracked corn, peanuts, suet, bread, peanut butter, lard mixes, seed mixes
House Finch	Mixed seed, peanuts, fruit, suet, niger, sunflower, safflower, thistle
Gold Finch	Thistle/nyger, sunflower seed, hulled sunflower, millet, fruit, suet, peanuts
House Wren	Suet, bread crumbs
House Sparrow	Mixed seed, sunflower seeds

Wrens	Suet, suet mix, peanut butter, bread, apples
Indigo Bunting	Peanuts, millet, variety of seeds
Northern Flicker	Suet, peanut butter, sunflower seeds, fruit, meat, bread
Oriole	Oranges, apples, grape jelly, oriole jelly, sugar water, soft raisins
Painted Bunting	Sunflower seeds, seed mixes
Pine Grosbeak	Sunflower seeds, grain
Pine Siskin	Nuts, rolled oats, thistle, mixed seeds, sunflower seeds, sunflower chips, millet, suet
Purple Finch	Sunflower seeds, thistle
Red Crossbills	Sunflower seeds, thistle
Red Poll	Suet, bread, sunflower seeds
Red Winged Blackbird	Bread, cracked corn, mixed seeds, sunflower seeds, sunflower chips, millet, suet
Robins, Bluebirds, Thrushes	Apples, sunflower seed, bread, grapes, suet, mealworms, berries, raisins, nut meal, seed mixes
Rose Breasted Grosbeaks	Sunflower seeds, grapes, orange halves
American Gold Finch	Sunflower seeds, thistle/niger
Black Billed Magpie	Meat, bread
Bobwhite Quail	Sunflower seeds, seed mixes
Brown Headed Cowbird	Bread, cracked corn, sunflower seeds, seed mixes
Bushtit	Bread, sunflower seeds, bird seed mixes
Cardinals	Cracked corn, nuts, sunflower seeds, safflower, millet, peanuts, apple, bread
Black Capped Chickadees	Sunflower seeds, peanuts, bread, suet
Crows	Bread, scraps, corn, suet
Magpies	Scraps, suet, peanuts, bread
Downy Woodpeckers	Sunflower seeds, corn, cornbread, peanut butter, suet, shelled peanuts, sunflower seeds
Grosbeaks	Sunflower seeds, safflower, apple, fruit, suet, millet, bread, peanut kernels
Buntings	Sunflower seeds, safflower, apple, fruit, suet, millet, bread, peanut kernels
Grackles	Sunflower seeds, bread, scraps
Titmouse	Sunflower seeds, suet, bread, safflower, peanuts, peanut kernel
Chickadees	Peanut kernel, sunflower seeds, suet, bread, safflower
Nuthatches	Suet, suet mix, sunflower seeds, nuts, cracked corn, bread
Creepers	Suet, suet mix, sunflower seeds, nuts, cracked corn, bread
Mockingbirds	Halved apples, fruit, bread, suet, sunflower seeds, nuts
Thrashers	Halved apples, fruit, bread, suet, sunflower seeds, nuts
Flycatchers, Phoebes	Bees, wasps, ants, mealworms
Kinglets	Suet, bread
Waxwings	Berries, raisins, sliced apple, canned peas, currants, grapes
Warblers	Suet, suet mix, water, fruit, breads, sugar water, nut pieces
Tanagers	Suet, fruit, sugar water, mealworms, bread
Song Sparrows	Sunflower seeds, seed mixes, bread, thistle, millet
Starlings	Bread, scraps, suet
Steller's Jays	Nuts, scraps, suet

Tree Sparrows	Wild bird seed mixes, millet
Sparrows	Millet, peanut kernels, suet, bread, canary seed, sunflower seed
White Breasted Nuthatches	Peanuts, sunflower seeds, suet, safflower
Hairy Woodpeckers	Sunflower seeds, nuts, cheese, apples, bananas, suet, peanut butter
Yellow Bellied Sapsuckers	Nutmeats, suet, fruit
Quail	Cracked corn, millet, berries
Pigeons	Cracked corn, sunflower seeds, milo, bread, thistle, nuts
Doves	Cracked corn, sunflower seeds, milo, bread, thistle, nuts
Roadrunners	Meat scraps, suet
Hummingbirds	Plant nectars, small insects, sugar water, instant nectars
Woodpeckers	Insects, fruit, sunflower seeds, suet, nuts, sugar water
Western Tanagers, Scarlet Tanagers	Orange halves, grapes
Juncos	Millet, sunflower seeds, cracked corn, peanuts, bread, nut meats, thistle, suet
Towhees	Millet, sunflower seeds, peanuts, grapes, cracked corn, suet
Rufous Sided Towhee	Bird seed mixes, thistle, sunflower seeds, millet, cracked corn
Baltimore Oriole	Suet, orange halves
Brown Thrashers	Orange halves, cracked corn
Carolina Wrens	Suet, sunflower chips
Cat Birds	Raisins, grapes, orange halves, suet
Mourning Dove	Millet, thistle, sunflower chips, safflower, cracked corn
Pileated Woodpeckers	Suet
Red Bellied Woodpeckers	Suet, sunflower seeds, peanuts, orange halves, safflower, cracked corn

Hanging up bird feeders without using a ladder is easy when you purchase this handy hanger.



The design of the Easy Lift Hanger makes it easy to use a broom handle or long pole to hang and take down feeders, chimes, plants or anything that uses a hook. It holds 20 lbs., and it's made in the USA! Available on eBay and Amazon.com. The long hook on the right comes in different lengths and makes it more difficult for squirrels to raid feeders.



## Top 10 Bird-Feeding Myths

by Bill Thompson, III  
Editor, [Bird Watcher's Digest](#)

**10. Feeders Keep Birds From Migrating.** If this were true, we'd have hummingbirds and orioles clinging to our feeders all winter long. Birds migrate when their natural internal "clocks" give them the urge to migrate. Migration is driven by instinct and external factors such as sunlight and weather, not by the availability of sunflower seed or food at feeders. One thing to note is that birds need extra food during migration, so it's a nice idea to keep your feeders stocked in case a hungry migrant plops down in your yard looking for food.

**9. Bird Feeding Is Really Bad/Good for Birds.** Let's face it, birds did just fine before we decided, a few hundred years ago, to feed them. Birds do not need the food we provide for them. It's a nice compromise between our desire to see birds in our backyards and the birds' willingness to take advantage of our

largesse. Birds do not rely solely on our feeders for their survival, and they certainly do not rely on our feeders for necessary nutrients, so it's wrong to say that feeding is "good" for birds. By the same token, when bird feeding is done in a conscientious manner, it is also not bad for birds. Yes, messy feeding stations can harbor disease, and food can sometimes spoil at our feeders, but if these scenarios are avoided, bird feeding is enjoyable for us and attractive to the birds. If you wish to stretch the argument to include whether millions of bird feeders have an impact on bird populations, then yes, we can argue about the negative effects of bird feeding. But let's not do that now. Let's go on to the next myth....

**8. Birds Will Starve if You Stop Feeding in Winter.** Birds have evolved over the eons as incredibly adaptive, mobile creatures. Unless a bird is sick or debilitated, it can use its wings (or legs) to range far and wide in search of food. Birds that cannot move in search of food are likely doomed to perish anyway, which is part of the natural scheme of things. So when you're going away on vacation for two weeks in the middle of a cold, snowy winter spell, it's nice if you can arrange for a neighbor to keep your feeders filled. Most serious feeder operators wouldn't think of letting their feeders go empty. But if it happens while you're gone, as it has happened to me, realize that your birds did not all starve, they just went somewhere else to find food. Now you'll have to work to lure them back!

**7. The Mixed Seed at the Grocery Store Is Bad.** I believed this with all my heart until recently when I saw some decent mixed birdseed for sale at a fancy grocery store. Granted, the stuff at my local chain grocery store is still absolute junk, unfit for rock doves. But some seed producers seem to be getting the message that quality seed is worth selling. The trick to telling the junk seed from the better stuff is to read the ingredients. Junk seed has almost none of the following: black-oil sunflower, peanut bits, safflower, millet, or sunflower hearts. It will have lots of milo, wheat, barley, cracked corn, and upon visual inspection, perhaps some empty hulls, sticks, and other inedibles. The best mixes feature a hearty helping of sunflower seed in some form.

**6. Birds Won't Eat Milo.** Years ago in an early issue of Bird Watcher's Digest, one of our editorial cartoons stated emphatically that "Real Birds Don't Eat Milo." Readers in the eastern half of North America nodded in agreement, but those folks in the Southwest howled their ridicule and protested loudly. Red milo is a staple of western bird feeding, especially in the Southwest where a variety of quail, doves, towhees, and sparrows readily eat it. In the East and upper Midwest, birds don't seem to eat milo much at all, so any mixed seed with a large percentage of milo will probably go mostly uneaten.

**5. Blackbirds/Squirrels Won't Eat Safflower Seed.** Safflower was once considered by many feeder operators to be the anti-blackbird and anti-squirrel food. Cardinals seemed to love it, but blackbirds and squirrels did not. That's not really true anymore, but nobody knows why. Many folks who feed safflower report that any bird or mammal that eats sunflower will also eat safflower. Safflower seed is still a nice alternative food to offer; it works in any feeder suitable for sunflower seed and it can be bought in bulk at feed stores. A blackbird and squirrel deterrent it is not, but then again, what is?

**4. There's Only One Hummingbird Species Found East of the Rocky Mountains.** Gone are the days when this statement could be considered true. There are even breeding records for other hummingbird species (mainly the buff-bellied hummingbird) in southern Texas. In winter this statement is even less accurate because there can be as many as 10 different hummingbird species visiting feeders throughout the southeastern states. In addition to our regular eastern breeder, the ruby-throated hummingbird, eastern states now regularly play host to rufous hummingbirds, a hardy species that can breed as far north as Alaska. It is unclear if this is a new phenomenon or if the explosive growth of hummingbird feeding has made these birds more noticeable. I'm still waiting for the first good unusual hummer at our feeders.

**3. Red Dye in Hummer Food Is Bad.** We'd like to think we know what is best for the birds we feed, but in a lot of cases, we don't. It certainly seems logical that adding food coloring to hummingbird nectar solution might not be good for the birds drinking it, but the fact is, we don't have any scientific proof to that effect. So it's one of those innocent-until-proven-guilty things. And until some scientist does the testing, there will continue to be millions of packages of red-dyed hummingbird nectar being sold and used. As Jerry Seinfeld used to say: "Not that there's anything wrong with that." This is what I'm saying: Hello out there. Any ornithology graduate students reading this? I've got an idea for your dissertation!

**2. Perches on Hummer Feeders Are Bad.** It started out as anecdotal evidence that grew into a wave of mild hysteria. Hummingbird feeders with perches were killing hummingbirds! How? Well, the hypothesis was that hummers would land on a feeder perch in the early morning and drink a deep slurp of very cold nectar, and this jolt of coldness would cause them to go into torpor, a trancelike state in which body functions slow drastically to conserve energy. Some hummers were found hanging upside down from their perches, while others fell to the ground and were at the mercy of predators. Witnesses reasoned that the hummers did not generate enough body heat while sitting and thus succumbed to the cold.

Removing the perches would force the hummers to hover while feeding, thus generating body heat. Now, before you go out and rip the perches off your feeders, consider that there are lots of reasons why a hummer might behave in this way. The bird could be in a natural state of torpor, which is how hummers survive in extremely cold weather. A hummer that has been stung by a bee or wasp will behave strangely, as will one that is sick or perhaps injured from the fighting that occurs near a busy feeder. In my experience a feeder with perches allows many hummers to feed at once peacefully. Hummingbirds forced to hover at feeders seem to fight more readily, and are more active in defending a feeder. As with red dye, we don't have scientific evidence to prove that feeders with perches are bad for hummingbirds, so until we do, use your own good judgment. As for me, I'm pro perch.

**1. This Feeder Is 100% Squirrel Proof!** I am sorry, but there's just no way! Here I am setting myself up for angry letters from feeder manufacturers, but it is simply impossible to believe this statement. Oh, yes, you can make a feeder squirrel proof by placing it in the middle of a treeless lawn with a pole-baffle that would do the Pentagon proud. But nail that same feeder to your deck railing and watch the squirrels remove the confident smile from your face, along with all the seed in your feeder. Squirrels have the luxury of being way more resourceful than any bird feeder designer. Why? Because a squirrel is working to feed itself and its offspring, and it will throw itself into the task with all its might every single day. The squirrel thinks of nothing else but the seed inside that feeder, and how to get at it. The feeder designer, meanwhile, is thinking about lunch and vacation and next Tuesday's staff meeting and bowling league. That's why the squirrels win every time.

## A SAMPLING OF BIRDHOUSES TO USE IN SHELBY COUNTY

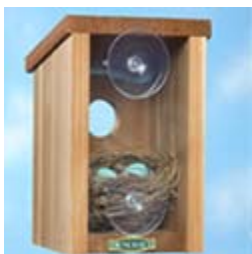


Bluebird House – note slanted roof and no perch. It can be mounted on a post about 5 feet above ground level. Watch out for sparrows and wrens that may try to take over the house. It is against the law to remove a wren nest that has eggs in it, but it is advisable to remove all evidence of house sparrow nests, adults, and eggs. House sparrow nests will be made of twigs and odd pieces of trash like twist ties and shredded plastic bags. Bluebird nests are made mainly of soft grasses and pine needles.

(right and below). A special window mounting allows for easy viewing from indoors on some models. Although wrens clean out their homes, other birds do not. Make sure that the house you choose to build or buy offers a way to

remove the top or bottom so that it can be cleaned out. When the house is unoccupied, using waterproof gloves, remove the old nest. Since nests often harbor diseases or parasites, dispose of the nest rather than trying to save it for a craft project. Mix a solution of 9 parts water to one part bleach and scrub the inside and outside, making sure to get into all corners and crevices. Rinse with clear water and let it dry thoroughly. Many birds have 2 or more broods per year, and some even build a new nest on top of the old one, but

to reduce the incidence of disease or insect infestation, it's a good idea to clean out a birdhouse at least once a year.



Robins and Phoebes prefer to build their nests on open platforms rather than in houses. A nesting platform offers a sturdy base, a roof, and 3 sides with the front left open. Barn swallows will also use this type of “house” if several are placed close together. They should be mounted flush against the side of a building under the eaves or overhang.



The Purple Martin house is available in a variety of sizes beginning with 6 “rooms.” It should be mounted at least 12 feet high, preferably on an extension-type pole to make cleaning easier at the end of the season. Use predator guards to protect adults and nestlings from attacks by snakes,



raccoons, opossums, owls, and hawks. If house sparrows or starlings begin to build nests inside, be sure to clean out the house and throw away the contents.

If bird feeding or setting up a bird house interests you, check out the limitless choices available at the Brick Barn and at online stores. For those who are artistic and/or handy, there are also free plans and blueprints to build houses and feeders on the web.