



All About
**Backyard
Birds**

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Backyard Birds

About Backyard Birds

Backyard birds provide easy bird watching pleasure from the comfort of your own home. You can sit at your kitchen table watching birds gather at the feeder, bird bath, or bird house in your yard. But once you stop and close pay attention to them, you may be amazed at all the different varieties you will see.



Backyard Bird Identification

It is helpful to have binoculars, to view the birds more closely, and a field guide or guidebook of birds in your area. With these two basic pieces of bird watching equipment and a few other supplies, you will be ready to take in the winged wonders in your yard. Your binoculars need not be fancy or expensive; a simple 8x25 (which enlarges what you are seeing to 8 times its normal size) binocular will do fine for easy bird watching. The field guide you select should be specific to the part of country you are in. If your bird watching will be limited to those you see in your backyard, a field guide devoted mainly to song birds and migratory birds in your area can be most helpful. If you are planning to venture out for further bird watching activities, a more comprehensive field guide is in order.

Your field guide will be invaluable in helping you identify the wild birds you see. As you become more experienced in bird watching, you will be able to more quickly identify the birds around you – sometimes merely by hearing them. To quickly identify a bird, it helps to be familiar with the general terms associated with bird anatomy and identification. For instance, it is important to know the difference between the crest (the feathers at the very top of a bird's head) and the crown (the shorter feathers below the crest) when trying to identify a bird. This can be especially important if you do not have time to locate the bird in your field guide and simply jot down a few notes to refer to later.

Attracting Backyard Birds

Where to Feed Them

To attract birds to your yard, hang one or more bird feeders and provide the birds with a source of water. Use your field guide to determine which birds you are most likely to attract, since this will help you determine what type of seeds and even what kind of feeder to use. Some basic types of bird feeders are hoppers, platforms, tubes, and suet feeders. There are bird feeders specifically for particular breeds, such as hummingbird feeders. Be sure your bird feeder is weather-resistant and securely hung.

Hopper feeders hold seed in a main cavity that feeds out onto a small platform area. These feeders tend to attract species like titmice, chickadees, cardinals, and finches. Hopper feeders are usually easy to fill and clean, but must be checked regularly to make sure the seeds do not become moldy.

Platform feeders, on the other hand, are narrow, flat trays that hold seed, fruit, or nuts. Platform feeders are usually designed to encourage birds to feed along the edge of the tray. Some platform feeders also have a second platform that hangs below the feeding tray, to catch uneaten seeds or



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discarded seed hulls. These feeders attract similar species that hopper feeders do, as well as nuthatches, wrens, and orioles. Easy to fill, platform feeders should be filled every day or two to keep food fresh.

Tube feeders are cylinders to be filled with seed, with holes or ports in the sides for feeding. Tube feeders can usually hold enough feeds for several days, and are generally easy to fill. Tube feeders tend to attract chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers and finches, among other species.

Finally, suet feeders are specially-designed mesh cages to hold blocks or cakes of suet. Suet feeders attract chickadees, woodpeckers, mockingbirds, and wrens, as well as other species.

What to Feed Them

Wild bird seeds come in many different types. There are different seed blends or mixes available, depending on the types of birds you are trying to attract. Wild bird seeds may come loose or on a feeding stick, bell, or other device. Popular wild bird seeds include black oil sunflower seed, millet, and cracked corn. Wild bird seeds can not only attract birds to your yard, but can also help sustain them through the winter when scavenging for food can be more difficult. A word of caution though - squirrels are often attracted to wild bird seeds. To help keep squirrels from raiding your bird feeder, try using commercial squirrel baffles or bird feeders especially designed to foil squirrels.

When selecting a wild bird seed, choose seed blends that have a high meat-to-shell ratios - meaning there are plenty of whole, filled shells. Be sure the type of seed you select is appropriate for your breed, or for the breeds you are trying to attract. Black oil sunflower seed is a popular choice for wild birds because the shells are thin enough for small birds to open. Sparrows, juncos, and goldfinches enjoy these seeds. Many wild bird seed blends also contain millet, which is a favorite of sparrows, Carolina wrens, doves and cardinals, among others. Cracked corn is popular in blends, as well. One note about cracked corn: it attracts grackles, sparrows, blackbirds and others you may not want gathering at your feeder. If these birds are common in your area, look for a blend of wild bird seed that does not include cracked corn.

Also, do not forget to store your wild bird seeds in a dry location, and check it often for molds. Throw out any moldy bird seeds.

Some birds like suet, in addition to seeds. Suet bird food is animal fat intended to be fed to wild birds. It can be the plain meat fat, often kidney fat from cows, which can be purchased from a butcher, or rendered suet that is mixed with seed, berries, or other bird foods and formed into cakes. Raw suet can be placed in the feeder on its own as long as temperatures remain below 70 degrees. If the temperature gets warmer than that, the fat will melt or go rancid. Rendered suet can be used in warmer temperatures, and can be mixed with seeds, berries, peanut butter, or other bird treats.



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[2Qt. Mixed Seed Feeder with Tray](#)

Housing your Feathered Friends

Bird houses can range from simple structures to attract birds for feeding to elaborate constructions with spaces for birds to nest. Most are made of wood, although other materials may also be used. These houses give birds places to rest and nest, and also give humans the opportunity to observe the birds in a non-intrusive manner.

Quality bird houses should mimic the natural habitats of the types of birds you are trying to attract. They should be built of materials that can withstand your climate. As a general rule, the openings of songbird houses should not be larger than 1 3/8 inches, to prevent house sparrows and starlings from nesting.

The types of bird you are trying to attract to your bird houses will dictate where you should hang the houses or not. Wrens, for example, are generally very comfortable around humans and their houses can be hung near your home. Some owls prefer to be near wooded areas, and bird houses for them should be hung at least 10 feet high. It is always best to consult a field guide to determine which birds are native to your area, and to identify the new feathered friends you attract.

Always be sure to hang bird houses securely to prevent them from falling. Your bird house should also have a hinged panel, to allow for easy cleaning. Your bird house will require at least one good annual cleaning (usually done in the very early spring). Aside from that, most all-weather bird houses do not require much maintenance. Simply check the bird house occasionally to remove any excess debris or to clean off droppings. Never disturb a nest in your bird house.



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