

Winter Feeding Advice

Offer birds a wide variety of food, especially fatty foods which are high in protein to help keep their little bodies fuelled up against the cold.

From fat balls to pastry there are plenty of foods that birds love to eat:

- Fat balls, fat cakes & Flutter Butter are extremely popular in the winter months. They can contain lard or beef suet, giving our feather friends plenty of energy in the cold months. - These can be purchased from most garden centres or large stores or why not try making your own at home, an activity children thoroughly enjoy. However please do not use chicken, turkey or vegetable fat, as these can be transferred onto the birds' feathers during preening, clogging feathers and hindering flight.
- Our birds love peanuts, but please do buy peanuts especially for birds, other sources may not have been checked for aflatoxin and could be harmful to birds. We would also recommend finely chopped nuts instead of whole, so they don't get stuck in their throats - alternatively offer nuts in specialist nut feeders so that the birds have to mash at the nuts to get to them. Avoid any plastic nets as birds can get injured in these.
- Seed mixes are another hit in our gardens, however, we would recommend you avoid the cheaper versions which contain larger seeds such as barley, lentils or split peas, which are only really eaten by bigger birds such as pigeons.



- Sunflower hearts & seeds are another firm favourite but did you know the black sunflower seed is better than a stripy one? The black seed has a higher fat content so are much better for birds. Sunflower hearts don't have husks that some seeds have. This means birds use less energy, as de-husking will not be required and there will be less waste (and mess) at your feeding station.

- Our birds also love a range of fresh and dried fruit (please soak your dried fruit first to avoid it expanding in the bird's tummy). Raisins, apples and bananas are firm favourites, but do be aware if putting out sultanas, as if you have a dog they can be harmful to them.
- Birds also enjoy other common household foods such as uncooked porridge oats, bacon rind, small amounts of cake or biscuit crumbs (robins love a bit of Christmas cake), cooked unsalted rice, small amounts of mild grated cheese and unsalted dry breakfast cereal e.g. Cheerios or corn flakes.



Do NOT feed:

- Bread, especially white bread; it is not a high quality food and will not give them the energy they need to survive.
- Milk can upset their tummies and make them very poorly, as can mouldy or stale food.
- Salty food can dehydrate birds.
- Desiccated coconut can swell in birds' stomachs.



Don't use plastic net feeders

The plastic nets around fat balls etc., are very dangerous for birds; they can get tangled up in them, so make sure never to hang them out with the plastic nets on. Most garden centres offer wire cages at little cost.



Don't forget your ground feeding birds

Certain birds such as blackbirds, robins & dunnocks prefer to feed on the ground.

If you don't wish to scatter food on the ground, a small dish will be sufficient. Fill with ripe fruit such as apples or raisins, songbird mixes or mealworms.



A great way of keeping these vulnerable ground-feeding birds safe from predators, such as free-roaming domestic cats, grey squirrels and sparrowhawks, is to put an old dog carrying cage over the scattered food, trays or dishes. This allows the smaller birds to access the food while keeping predators, scavengers and larger competitor birds like crows, magpies, jackdaws and pigeons out.

Don't let your bird baths freeze over

When it freezes, birds struggle to find a natural source of water as ponds & puddles may be frozen over. Keeping your bird baths, ponds or even a water bowl clean and frost free will really help them. To stop them freezing over add a clean ball (eg golf or ping pong ball) or wobbly rock to the water.



Clear Snow

Many birds will be grateful for clear patches in the snow and ice. Grit and other nutrients available from the soil and ground are also needed to help with digestion and general health.

Don't forget that predators will be hungry too!

In the cold weather predators will need to eat more to keep warm as well. There are a few things you can do to avoid them snacking on your songbirds. Place bells on cats' collars so that they can alert the birds when they are too close. Predator-proof feeding stations are also very helpful.

Helping other wildlife



Clean water and food will encourage visiting hedgehogs to return regularly to your garden. Minced meat, fresh liver, tinned dog food (not fish based), or even scrambled eggs appeal to these prickly creatures.

Keeping the food under a platform or ridge tile will help to prevent other animals such as cats, dogs and foxes stealing the hedgehog's food. Build or buy a small feeding station or house to put the food into that will only allow hedgehogs to get in. Be aware – hedgehogs like milk but it may cause severe diarrhoea

in youngsters. It is best to provide fresh water each night in a shallow bowl.

If you have some useful feeding tips you'd like to share

Why not join and post in our Facebook group

let other bird lovers learn from you?

www.facebook.com/groups/songbirdfriends

Learn more about National Robin Day, Ruby Robin and what you can do to help all birds and wildlife at:

www.songbird-survival.org.uk/national-robin-day



National Robin Day
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