

The Grapevine

Feeding our Feathered Friends

Feeding the birds is one of my favorite winter activities. I love seeing the beautiful colors, crazy antics and feeling the joy that comes from caring for our feathered friends. This year my toddler (with assistance from his grandparents) made my husband a huge (I do mean huge) platform bird feeder that we are excited to try in our back yard. Through this year we have tried to start making our backyard more bird friendly as we started with a completely blank canvas. As cooler weather has set in for a bit many of us are looking forward to feeding the birds and watching them throughout the winter months. There is little as cheerful in the winter as a brilliant red Cardinal on a feeder, even on a snowy dreary day. Here are some tips to bring birds to your yard and feeders over the winter.

Picking the food- As you stand in the bird food aisle it can be an overwhelming display of different types of seed, mixes and even different forms of bird food. It's no wonder it can be overwhelming with over 20 different types of bird seed on the market at any time and no one seed is attractive to all birds. The best all-around seed option is Black oil sunflower seed. While it might be more expensive, it is preferred by many small birds with its thinner seed coat and high oil content that is important nutritionally for birds in winter. Other popular options include thistle seed that attracts goldfinches and purple finches, millet seed that attracts a variety of birds including sparrows and peanuts (either whole or the "hearts") that attract Blue jays, woodpeckers and others. Your best bet is to use a mix of seeds and use a variety of different feeders to attract the widest variety of species. Another option is Suet which is attractive to a variety of birds. Suet is a high-quality animal fat that is highly sought-after in winter. It is particularly attractive to woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice, although some atypical feeder birds like Carolina wrens and brown creepers also like it. A reminder with bird seed, you get what you pay for. Some of the cheaper mixes have less desirable seeds that the birds won't eat.



Location, Location, Location- When placing your feeders consider the location not only from your perspective but also from the birds prospective. My best luck feeding the birds has been in a house where I had protective cover within 10 feet of my feeders (shrubs, trees, etc) for the birds to hide from predators in and in view of my living room windows for my enjoyment. If you don't have much for cover in your yard, my new house has very little in the way of cover at this point, you can create it especially after Christmas using discarded trees. If you have the option consider developing cover using trees and shrubs over the next growing season. Don't forget to have a place for the birds to get water along with food in

your yard. Winter months can mean a time of drought for birds but a bird bath with a heater can solve that issue. Water will be very attractive to your birds in the winter. Place your water underneath or near branches so the birds have places to preen after bathing.

Even if we have a warm winter with little precipitation it is still important to feed our feathered friends throughout the winter. If you can provide water, that's even better and the birds will be more likely to hang around in your yard. It is important to remember to keep the bird feeders cleaned throughout the winter and it's best to only put the amount of bird food out that the birds can eat in a day. Don't allow mold or bird seed to accumulate in the bottom of your feeders for any length of time. Bird feeders can be a source of disease if they aren't maintained and cleaned on a regular basis. Remember to rake up debris on the ground on a regular basis or move the feeders periodically to spread the seed around. If you are going to be gone for awhile taper the amount of food off before you leave so the birds start finding new food sources till you are gone. Happy gardening!

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Houseplant of the Week-

In the winter houseplants can add a touch of color and help improve your mood through these dreary months. Every week I'm going to highlight some common and uncommon houseplants for you to give a try this winter. This week's plant is the Peace Lily. These common houseplants are popular because of their beauty and their hardy nature. They have dark green or even variegated leaves and showy white flowers. Peace lilies love well lit areas that are out of direct sunlight and prefer damp well drained soil. I call peace lilies the "divas" because they will clearly let you know if you let them get too dry by drooping dramatically then standing back upright after being watered. If the leaves of your lily get dusty wipe them off with a soft damp cloth or you can stick them in the shower for a nice shower to wash the dust off. They can be propagated in the spring by dividing the plant into smaller pieces and then repotting them into a new pot. Peace lilies are available in many places and are relatively inexpensive. Consider bringing home one of these beauties and letting them brighten your home this winter.



Things to Try-



Throughout the winter I'm going to talk about some unique, unusual and fun activities that you can try inside to help scratch that gardening itch till the spring arrives. This week I'm going to talk about growing food from kitchen scraps. Kitchen scrap gardening is a fun way to grow something new with some recycled food right in your home. This can be a fun activity for all ages not just for adults. Some food items that work well for growing kitchen scraps include celery, lettuce, pineapple, carrots, beets, avocado, citrus plants and many others.

Lemon, lime and orange trees can easily be grown from seeds in damp potting soil. These trees will eventually take up quite a bit of room but they will produce fruit in several years. Avocado's can be grown from the seed in the middle. Be sure to remove the seed coat (brown layer), find the pointed end and then insert three tooth picks (spaced evenly) around the top third of the seed. Rest the toothpicks on the edge of a glass and fill the glass with water till it touches the bottom of the seed. Celery, lettuce, cabbage and other greens can be grown from the bottom two inches of the stalk. Place them in a shallow bowl with water and after two to three weeks new roots should develop. You can then plant them in potting soil and eat the fruits of your labor. The process of growing food from kitchen scraps can be fun and rewarding although it can require some patience. For more information on kitchen scrap gardening check out this website by [University of Illinois Extension](#).

Reminders-

- Wait to cut frost killed perennials, unless diseases were present, till spring to provide a home for beneficial insects overwinter.
- Soil test your garden or flower bed spots.
- Winterize your lawn mower before you put it up for the year. Be sure to sharpen the blades or have the mower serviced before storing for the winter
- Drain your rain barrels and store for winter. Once the night temperatures are consistently around 30 degrees you should drain and clean your rain barrels for the winter.
- Plant spring blooming bulbs

Upcoming Events

• December 7, 2022: Accessible Gardening for All

Gardening is a passion for so many people, however due to physical challenges, many people find themselves limited or unable to garden. Join Calla Edwards, Butler County Horticulture Extension Agent to learn tips, tricks, and ways to make your gardening experience adaptable for everyone. For more information or to register [click here](#).