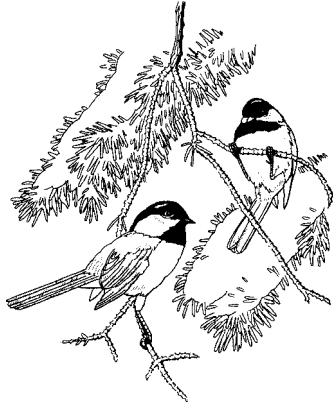


Encouraging songbirds in your backyard



The sun is bright and the air is fresh. The day would be perfect if it was not so quiet. The sweet melody that whistles through the wind is missing because your yard lacks any birds. Promoting the presence of songbirds in your backyard is fairly simple. Your yard should offer songbirds three things in order to make it a suitable home for them. Provide food, water, and shelter and you will have some entertaining neighbors in no time.

Washington's songbirds include the crows and jays, finches, warblers, thrushes, nuthatches, wrens, mockingbirds, and swallows to name a few. Some well known and colorful songbirds that spend much of their time in Washington include the Western Bluebird, Oregon Chickadee, House Finch, Western Robin. Each of these birds spends a majority of the year in Washington and nests there as well.

Important things to consider when improving your backyard habitat

1. Try to **avoid the use of pesticides** which can be fatal to ground foraging birds and the insects that many birds feed on.
2. **Retain dead snags and branches.** A snag is a dead tree that is still standing. Many birds make their home in holes they carve out of dead trees; dead branches provide perches for birds to survey their surrounding. Leafless branches will also allow easier bird viewing in the summertime.
3. **Leave some leaf litter** which will attract insects and provide food for foraging birds.
4. **Be aware of neighborhood cats.** Domestic cats are natural predators of songbirds and can have devastating impacts on local bird populations. Be sure and keep feeders, bird baths and nest boxes out of reach of cats.



Now that I'm attracting birds, what is next?

The next step is probably one of the most important steps—feeding. Birds are apt to stay longer if they are well fed. There are two types of feeding that can take place, summer and winter feeding.

Summer Feeding

Many plants offer berries and seeds for birds in the summer, but feeding out of an artificial feeder during this time can be handy because it can bring birds closer to a spot where they can easily be viewed.

One should start with the feeder far from the house and feed birds every day. Once a week move the feeder 5 or 6 feet closer to the house. Eventually you can place the feeder right outside of a window where the birds can easily be viewed. They will soon become accustomed to the antics of their human neighbors and will not frighten away too easily. Be sure not to overfeed during the summer or the birds may cease to rely upon their natural sources of food. Overfeeding happens when extra food is left out during most of the day so that the birds do not have to search for other food at all.

How and what do I feed ?

- Millet
- Sunflower
- Hempseed
- Buckwheat
- Cracked corn
- Dried Berries
- Store bought seed logs



Winter Feeding

Winter feeding may make your local birds dependent upon man for their food. Starting winter feeding and then stopping it may cause the deaths of hundreds of birds. If winter feeding is started it must be consistent throughout the winter when natural foods are in low supply. A winter feeding program should begin in early fall, possibly even late summer. As birds journey on their southbound migration they will stop at your feeders for food.

Local birds will usually be the first to become familiar with the facilities you have provided. Their presence will attract other migrating birds. Gradually these northern visitors will become acquainted with the local conditions and will be ready for the harsher cold of winter if they decide to stay. Once this winter feeding begins, do not miss a single day. Continue feeding well into spring when insects, seeds, and berries again become available for birds to eat.



Feeders

It is advisable to use separate feeders for insects and seed eating birds, but a combination feeder may be used. Several feeders should be placed to provide for the natural tendency of birds to flit from place to place. This feeder can be a simple platform feeder.

BEWARE!

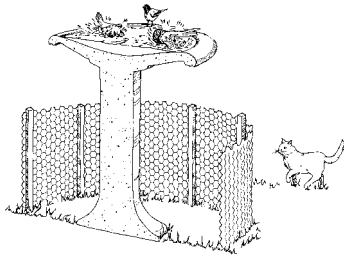
One of the most important things to think about when placing a feeder is whether or not you will be able to get to it in the middle of winter. Make sure that feeders are placed where paths will be made to get to them. Many feeders are often left untended in the winter because they become inaccessible.

The easiest feeder to build is a simple platform feeder, fig. 1. It is constructed with one $\frac{3}{4}$ x 12 x 18 inch base; 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 inch sides; 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{4}$ 12 inch sides. This can be attached to a 5 to 6 foot tall metal or wood pole and moved around the yard to bring the feeder closer to the house or window.

Although the platform feeder is simple and useful, it does have some disadvantages. While feeding, birds are exposed to cats. Squirrels can also be a problem as they will dominate the feeder if given the chance. Also, feed is left exposed to the weather. These problems can be solved by simply adding a roof and/or walls to the feeder.

Water

Food is important, but so is water, especially in the winter. Water can be provided by using a bird bath. Water should be changed regularly to keep it fresh and clean.



Food and water, anything else?

Food and water will attract birds to your property but using nest boxes may keep them there a while longer and will bring new birds back again and again.

A nest box is fairly easy to construct. The nest box described here is designed for bluebird use.

Use $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick exterior plywood. The floor of the box should be about 4 x 4 inches. The front and sides should range from about 8 to 10 inches with a hole of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch diameter 2 inches from the top. Different sized entrance holes will control the entrance of different birds. A simple horizontal or slightly sloping roof can be attached to the top. Ventilation holes on each side should be added by drilling $\frac{1}{4}$ inch holes on the side panels.

One thing to note is the height of the entrance hole. The hole is placed high on the birdhouse to prevent young birds from escaping from the house before they are well developed. The more development a young bird can achieve while inside the bird house, the better prepared it will be for the dangerous world outside

If screws are used in construction they should be brass screws to avoid rust. Nails should be box nails and should be coated to avoid warping. The nest box should be placed on posts that are not directly next to a tree. Predators may be able to reach the box. Boxes should be placed 3-5 feet above ground and should face south-east toward the early morning sun and away from prevailing winds. This offers protection from the intense heat of the afternoon sun. Also be sure not to place nest boxes anywhere where insecticides have been used extensively. This can be harmful to pecking birds.

Species Specific Measurements

Species	Floor of Box	Depth of Box	Hole Size	Hole above Floor
Chickadee	4" x 4"	9"	1 1/8"	7"
Bluebird	4" x 4"	8-12"	1 1/2"	6-10"
Titmouse	4" x 4"	9"	1 1/4"	7"
Nuthatch	4" x 4"	9"	1 3/8"	7"
Flickers	7" x 7"	15-16"	2 1/2"	14-16"
Wren	4" x 4"	6-8"	1 to 1 1/4"	4-6"

The front of the box should be a natural light color. A light colored front will make the dark entrance hole more conspicuous and may attract more birds. In hot temperatures an exterior lighter color may be desired because extreme heat can affect the development of eggs or young and may prove fatal. Do not paint the interior or use pressure treated wood. A nest placed deep in the box is a nice touch for the future occupants. It should be deep enough that it is beyond the reach of a predator—cats, squirrels, opossums. At least once during the year every nest box should be opened and cleaned out to avoid the inhabitant of parasites. Occasionally you may find other animals using the boxes as homes. This can be prevented by placing a metal inverted cone on the house.

Simple vs. fancy

Although fancy nest boxes may be quite attractive, they are not always ideal. A fancier nest box will attract more people and could possibly make the nest box more likely to be stolen. A simple, inconspicuous nest box will attract more birds over an extended period of time.

Trees and Shrubs to attract birds

Alder - The alder is a small tree that can be planted in large numbers. No birds nest in this tree, but it produces a fruit in August and September that is eaten by over 20 species of birds, including the tree sparrow, mourning dove.

American Elm - Good if a lot of space is available. This tree can grow up to 129 feet tall. It provides good nesting and produces a winged nut seed in March and May that is eaten by the western gold finch, and others. Insects in the bark are eaten by vireos and warblers.

Birch - Offers good nesting. Woodpeckers and chickadees use decayed limbs to build their nests upon. This tree produces a seed that feeds the titmouse, finch and blue jay.

Cherry—Black, Choke, Red - Not very good for nesting but the fruit it provides feeds over 80 species of birds.

Oak (Red) - If you have patience, this may be a good choice. The oak is slow growing with a maximum height of 150 feet. It provides good nesting and protection. Produces acorns, which are eaten by most species of birds. Insects that infect the bark are also eaten.

White Pine - Excellent cover, good nesting for finches and warblers. Cones provide an abundance of seed.

Black Huckleberry - Quite attractive in the fall. This shrub provides shelter but no nesting. Over 45 species enjoy the fruit that is available for a short time during the summer.

Dogwood - Good protection and fair nesting. In September blue-white berries are formed and are favored by all birds until about midwinter.

High Bush Blueberry - Excellent fall foliage but only fair nesting. The fruit ripens in midsummer and is eaten by over 90 species of birds.

For more information on backyard birds check out these sources:

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