

Features

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Special Tweet: Dinner is Served

John Johnston

When it's finally cold and/or snowy, winter holds fantastic entertainment value in the form of wild birds. Turn your customers on to the delightful sights and sounds that a wild bird feeder can provide outside their window at home!



Setting the Table

Wild birds have three necessities for survival: food, water and protection. Consumers can assist them by providing extra food and water options at or near their homes, especially during the winter months.

Birding experts recommend that feeders be cleaned regularly to prevent diseases that are common among birds throughout the year. Some of the leading feeder manufacturers offer models with removable tops and/or bottoms for cleaning convenience. One manufacturer, Aspects, has a top-quality

feeder that offers all the best features and a lifetime warranty for the consumer.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology recommends that feeders be cleaned once every two weeks. Your customers don't have to feel intimidated; let them know it's easy to do:

- Simply remove the feeder and disassemble, if applicable.
- Using rubber gloves, brush crevices and perches with a bristle brush.
- Mix a solution of one part household bleach and 10 parts tap water, and allow the feeder (and parts) to soak in the solution for 10 to 15 minutes.
- After removing from the solution, you may brush crevices and perches again, if needed.
- Allow the feeder to completely dry and refill with fresh, clean seed.

Placement

Most folks instinctively want to place bird feeders near their windows; educate your customers on how to lessen the risk of birds flying into clear windowpanes. Here are a couple of tips you can offer:

- Apply some reflective tape on glass surfaces or hang a CD disc to break up the birds' sight lines.
- Position your feeders a few feet away from your home; doing so offers some good views and lessens the birds' takeoff speed to impact with glass.

Different bird species feed where they feel most comfortable. The most common way to hang a feeder is by suspending it by a hook from a tree branch. The security of a tree is a huge benefit for birds from predators like cats and hawks. Surrounding shrubs can also offer protection and security. Many avid bird watchers use multiple feeders and different foods to attract the greatest variety of bird species. These feeders should be placed at various levels for best results in attracting the largest variety of bird species.

What's on the Menu?

Birds require more protein and fat in their winter diets to maintain warmth and energy levels. The most commonly sold fuel for birds is black oil sunflower seed. Meaty seed offerings provide some oil content and lots of protein. Lyric Delight is a hull-free, waste-free bird food that features a mixture of five high-quality seeds and nuts like pumpkin seed, pecan pieces, sunflower hearts, pistachio chunks and shelled peanuts. These meatier seeds are fantastic for wild birds in winter! Another solid favorite is Coles Wild Bird Special Feeder food. It features a mixture of black oil sunflower, sunflower meats, striped sunflower, raw peanuts, pecans and safflower.

You may also consider stocking another homeowner favorite—suet—to your bird-feed assortment. Pine Tree Farms is a New York-based company that offers some of the finest suet products available. High quality seeds, grains, peanuts and their time-tested rendered beef kidney-fat formula make their selections unmatched in variety and a consumer favorite.

Your selling region may have different manufacturers, offering lesser quality feeds at attractive prices, so buyer beware. Independent garden centers should pride themselves on selling a higher quality product, differentiation and greater variety than the discount box stores. Their offerings are often limited and predictable. Independent garden centers have the ability to offer a “smorgasbord” to satisfy any bird lover.

Party Crashers

At some point in our lives, we've all experienced unexpected dinner guests. The common gray squirrel is one of the busiest creatures during the fall, gathering acorns and other foods, and burying them everywhere imaginable. Yet, they're still drawn to bird feeders like a magnet. Thankfully, you can offer several alternatives for customers who didn't invite squirrels to their backyard party.

Squirrel baffles are worthy complements to any feeder offering; styles exist for mounting both above and below bird feeders. Squirrel-proof feeders are another option for consumers. Brome is a splendid

manufacturer of great squirrel-proof feeders and a top choice of consumers nationwide.

Pepper-coated feeds turn up the heat for squirrels, but they won't bother the birds. Coles Wild Bird offers three outstanding foods—Hot Meats, Cajun Cardinal and Blazing Hot Blend—all of which offer a 100% natural and chemical-free liquid habanero chili pepper coating to spice things up a bit.

Eat, Drink and Feel Merry

Wild birds occasionally have some difficulty sourcing water when outdoor temperatures turn truly frigid. Help your customers keep a steady flow of feathered friends in their yards by offering small water heater elements to install in their birdbaths. Another unique item is the antique-looking Mason Jar Wild Bird Waterer from Perky Pet. The birds will appreciate the easy access to fresh liquid refreshment during the harsh winter months.

Now is a perfect time for a promotional focus on birding. With a bit of planning, nature can provide an enticing visual display and soothing soundtrack to take the edge off a chilly day for young and old alike. **GP**

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