



Friends of NCTC Program Activity
c. 2021 Friends of National Conservation Training Center

Holiday For The Birds

(ages 5 and older)

Now that the temperature is getting colder, birds are looking for food. You can help!

Background

Birds that don't migrate benefit from people providing a variety of food in the colder months. Some of the most common winter feeder birds are Cardinals, Goldfinches, Chickadees, House and Purple Finches, Juncos, and several types of Woodpeckers. Some winter birds prefer fruit, others are predators and like mealworms, and many enjoy seeds. Almost all of them like peanut butter suet! The shape of a bird's beak determines what kind of food it eats.

What You Will Need for This Project

Mixed birdseed (available at feed stores, places like WalMart, pet stores, etc)

What's For Lunch: Tablespoon measure, Flat bowl or tray, Craft stick or dinner knife

Build Your Own Birdfeeder: medium-sized plastic container (milk, yogurt, juice, etc.), scissors or box cutter, single hole punch or skewer, string, thin wooden dowels or spoons

Birdseed Biscuits: Biscuit mix, Sesame and/or sunflower seeds (optional), Butter or margarine (optional), cookie cutters, string

Birdseed Cookies: birdseed, unflavored gelatin, hot water, bowl, cookie cutters, string

Make Your Own Suet: suet (available in most grocery baking aisle), peanut butter, birdseed

Pine Cone Suet Feeders: Suet mixture, pinecones (any shape, but cones that have opened are much more effective, string or ribbon, knife or rubber spatula

What to Do

Not all birds migrate. Those that don't migrate need help finding food in the winter and we can help by giving them birdseed at bird feeders. Most birdseed that people purchase has a mixture of different types of seeds because that attracts the most variety of birds



What's For Lunch? Measure out about 1 T. of mixed birdseed in a flat bowl or tray. Using a narrow craft stick or a dinner knife, separate it, into different the different types. You will probably find sunflower seeds, red millet, and white millet (both millets are round). Some mixtures will have corn. You may also find pieces of stems that occur during the processing and bagging of the seed.

Count the number of seeds you have for each type and record it here.

	White Seeds	Red Seeds	Sunflower Seeds	Corn	Other
More than 20					
16-20					
11-15					
6-10					
0-5					

Build Your Own Birdfeeder Many people put out bird seed in the winter and most use bird feeders. Bird feeders come in many shapes and sizes. Some are designed for specific types of seed. Others are designed to keep squirrels out of the seed. Can you make one from recycled materials? A bird feeder should:

- make birds feel safe (so they can see what is around them).
- keep the seed dry in the rain (or drains easily)
- stays fairly stable in the wind
- is placed someplace where you can see it easily (hanging, platform, etc.)

It's easy to make your own feeder using anything from a square milk container to a round yogurt container!

You will also need:

- scissors or box cutter (ask for adult help)
- single hole punch or skewer
- string
- thin wooden dowels or spoons

Wash out your desired container and let it dry completely. Then very carefully cut out several small holes along the sides near the bottom*. Make sure they are large enough for a bird's head to fit inside but small enough that a bird will not be able to climb inside. Punch two small holes about the size of your dowels on opposite side of your container just below the openings you have cut. Insert the dowels into these holes so that the ends of the wood stick out on both sides. These will serve as perches for the feeding birds. Punch two holes at the top of your container and thread a string through in a large loop. Fill your new feeder with desired birdseed and hang near your house. Be sure to hang it somewhere where birds will have space to perch.

*If you are using a square container like a gallon milk jug, you can cut one large opening in the side so that birds may perch and feed.

You can also cut off the bottom of 64 oz. plastic soda bottle, so it is about 3-4" tall. Punch 3 holes evenly around the top. Add string evenly to all sides to create a three-sided hanger. Fill with bird seed to create a flat feeder.

Birdseed Biscuits: This is an easy way to make hanging feeders. Mix 2 cups biscuit baking mix, 2 cups of wild bird seed, and a ½ cup cold water. [Increase water if needed to make dough.] Roll out dough to 3/4 inch thick and cut it into shapes with cookie cutters. Using a straw, punch a hole in the top of each cookie. [Melt 2 tablespoons of margarine and brush over the dough. Now sprinkle sesame and sunflower seeds onto the dough and press in firmly with a fork. Or coat with peanut butter after cooling and add seeds.] Bake for 15-20 minutes in a 425° oven, until light brown. When cool, thread brightly colored ribbon through the hole and hang in a tree.

Make Your Own Suet:

1 c suet

1 c crunchy peanut butter (not low fat, natural or organic is best)

2 c cornmeal

1 c oatmeal

1 c sunflower seed, chopped unsalted nuts, chopped dried fruit

Melt suet on low heat, stir in peanut butter. Slowly mix in other ingredients. (It will be stiff). Allow mixture to cool. Spread on pinecones and hang them by a string or put in a mold to cool. This suet can be frozen.

Now it's time to find out if the birds like what you have created!

Who Eats What? Birds can be choosy! Put out a variety of birdseed and then watch to see what birds are attracted to each food. Using the chart on the next page, make a mark for every kind of bird you see. Is it the same bird or a different one? If you see one bird and then another that looks just like it, you don't know if it is the same one, so you can only count one. But if you see two or more birds alike at the same time then you can count all of them.

BIRD		TYPE OF FEEDER	TYPE OF FOOD	THE FOOD I TRIED	THE BIRDS WE SAW
Northern Cardinal (male)		ground tray, post, tube feeder	sunflower, safflower, peanuts, insects, cracked corn, white millet, white bread, melon seeds, raisins, bananas		
Northern Cardinal (female)		Same as above	Same as above		
House Finch/ Purple Finch		high post, hanging and tube feeders	sunflower, safflower, thistle, insects, peanuts, suet mixtures, white and red millet		
Blue Jay		ground, any seed or suet feeders	insects, whole corn, striped sunflower, peanuts, suet mixtures		
Black-capped or Carolina Chickadee		any type of feeder or the ground	sunflower, safflower, suet mixtures, peanuts, thistle, peanut butter, insects, sugar water, pie crust		
Mourning Dove		ground or low tray/post feeders	cracked corn, white and red millet, safflower, thistle, wheat		
Goldfinch (winter plumage)		Hanging feeders, tube feeders, thistle feeders/socks	Thistle seeds, sunflower seeds		

Winter Bird Bingo: Some of these birds will come to a backyard feeder but others will more like be found flying in the sky. See how many you can find!

B	I	R	D	S
 <p>Woodpecker (Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied, etc).</p>	 <p>Canada Goose-look for a “V” formation as they fly.</p>	 <p>Northern Cardinal-look for a flash of red in the trees</p>	 <p>Carolina Chickadee-look for a black head and throat</p>	 <p>Crow-much bigger than other black birds</p>
 <p>Blue Jay-listen for a “jay-jay” call that is loud.</p>	 <p>Pileated Woodpecker-this bird is BIG!</p>	 <p>Black Vulture-look for its white wing tips!</p>	 <p>Bald Eagle-these soar high, look for the white head and tail.</p>	 <p>Mourning Dove - listen for a “cooing” sound early in the morning.</p>

Helpful Hints for Adults

<https://www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/attracting-birds/feeding-birds/make-homemade-suet/>

<https://www.almanac.com/content/homemade-bird-food-recipe-suet>

<https://playofthewild.com/2020/01/24/how-to-make-a-bird-feeder-without-peanut-butter-suet-cake/>

*For a hilarious look at how inventive squirrels are in getting birdseed, <https://mashable.com/video/squirrel-obstacle-course-video> (about 20 minutes, but family friendly and totally worthwhile.)

*In February, kids may enjoy taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count. By feeding birds in December and January, they should be familiar with your feeders and come readily during February 18-21, 2022.

birdcount.org

*Field guides are a great way to help kids identify the birds that come to your feeder. Some suggestions for younger birders are:

Stokes Beginner’s Guide to Birds (Eastern or Western Region, depending on where you live. A top choice because of the pictures and ease of use)

National Audubon Society First Field Guide to Birds

Birds of North America (Golden Field Guide)

The Young Birder’s Guide to Birds of North America

Sibley’s Guide to Birds

Merlin Bird ID App (free, but large)