

Bird Feeding

Natural sources of bird food include grass seeds, berries, fruits and insects. Increasing those natural sources of food by careful landscaping can increase the amount of birds and other wildlife in your yard. Supplementing those natural sources by using purchased seed is another way to increase the bird population in your yard. According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR), over 65 species of wild birds visit bird feeders in the Midwest. Here at the Living Lab, the black capped chickadee and white breasted nuthatch are the most common birds visiting our feeders.

Bird feeding is also an important part of our economy. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicates that over \$2 billion dollars a year is spent on bird seed. The Red River Valley is a major supplier of oil sunflowers, the single most popular purchased bird seed.



Black-capped Chickadee.

Bird feeders can be as simple as an old pie pan placed on the deck railing to purchased feeders costing several hundred dollars each. There are a wide variety of commercial feeders available at big box and specialty stores. Some people like to build their own feeders and there are several good books available with plans. *Wood Working for Wildlife* from the MN DNR is perhaps the most locally appropriate and comprehensive book available.

Common types of feeders include tray (open and covered), tube (nyjer, sunflower, peanut), window, suet, hummingbird, oriole, hopper and many more. The feeder is designed for the type of feed that will be used. Usually cheap feeders offer a short life span and frustration for the owner

when they are damaged by squirrels or fall apart after a few weeks. A quality feeder will usually last 10 years or more. At the Living Lab we primarily use tray and tube feeders.

Depending upon the type of feeder they can be placed on the ground, hung from a tree or pole, mounted on a pole, attached to a window or placed on a deck railing.

Squirrels often become the greatest source of frustration for most people feeding birds. They can climb just about anything and will eat thorough wood or plastic to get to seeds. Quality bird feeders are usually built to resist squirrel damage. Baffles can be built or purchased which also deter most squirrels. At the Living Lab, in addition to squirrels, we also deal with raccoon, deer and an occasional wild turkey.



Squirrel on feeder.



Redpole eating from tube feeder.

In this region there are over 20 types of seeds as well as mixes of those seeds that can be purchased for feeding. However; a person new to feeding soon learns that some seeds attract undesirable birds or perhaps no birds at all. Usually cheap mixes result in few birds at the feeder. According to research by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the best all around seed for feeding is the black oil sunflower followed by striped sunflowers, hulled sunflowers, peanut kernels, white proso millet, nyjer and several more. Careful attention to seed type will make your feeding experience more desirable. For instance, feeding cracked corn and bread scraps will attract house sparrows, an undesirable exotic species that competes with native species for nesting cavities.

Other types of food can also be fed to birds. Some common items include apples, oranges, watermelons, grape jelly, bananas, peanut butter, animal fat and suet, egg shells, sugar water, dog food and mealworms.