FINDING TIME

Stress-Free Winter Feeding

By Bloomington Asst. Manager TRISH WAGLE

As the busy holiday season approaches, everyone’s to-do list grows. With so many extra chores and errands, filling the bird feeder may become a hassle, or even—heaven forbid!—fall by the wayside. But winter is the season when birds appreciate our feeding stations the most. So, we’ve assembled some tips to make feeding your birds easy and stress-free.

Size Up Your Feeders

First of all, evaluate the size of your feeders. Consider replacing one or more smaller capacity tube feeders with a large capacity hopper or tube feeder for the winter. Larger feeders require fewer refills, requiring you to make fewer snowy treks through your backyard.

Two great large capacity options are the Arudale Sky Café feeder, which hold 5-½ quarts of seeds, and the Aspects® Quick Clean® Big Tube feeders,

Select a Prime Location

While you’re evaluating the size of your feeders, consider their location. Move feeders closer to your house or onto your deck to make it easy to fill them—without shoveling a path or stomping through the snow. Plus, you’ll get to see the birds up close!

When placing your feeders, keep in mind that while cold winter temperatures provide a short reprieve from raccoons and chipmunks, you’ll still need a plan to deter squirrels. Squirrels can jump five feet vertically and ten feet horizontally, so make sure you get your feeders both up and away. Consider deer as well. Aided by tall snowdrifts, deer can reach feeders that may have been out of reach during the summer. Pole extensions will help get feeders up and out of reach from non-feathered critters. (Continued on page 4 . . .)
A Matter of Timing

This past June, the National Wildlife Federation released a research report called *Shifting Skies: Migratory Birds in a Warming World*. Among the study’s findings: bird ranges and populations are shifting.

Changes in timing and missed connections are major factors affecting migratory birds. Species of birds that begin migration based on temperature cues, for example, may arrive at their destinations earlier, only to find their habitat or food sources are not yet available. Others, relying more on day length cues for migration, arrive at their same time, only to discover that they’ve missed important insects, foods or flowers whose seasonal timing, or phenology, were also altered by changing climate conditions.

Among our species already showing changes in their migration and breeding patterns include the American Robin, Eastern Bluebirds, six species of thrushes and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. We’ve also heard anecdotal changes of other species’ migration patterns from our customers.

As we delve into our coldest months, be on the lookout for species that have expanded their winter ranges and make sure you include their needs on your feeding station menu. We’ve sold a lot of mealworms over the last few winters to help satisfy the large flocks of American Robins that have been sticking around.

— Al and Dave Netten

Worry-Free Guarantee!

We want our customers to have a worry-free experience with every purchase. If you’re not completely satisfied with any item purchased from our store, simply return it to us for an exchange or refund. No worries . . . ever.

Join the conversation online!

Visit our Facebook page to post photos, ask questions and be the first to know about upcoming sales and events.

HOLIDAY GIFTS

The perfect gifts for bird lovers

Don’t forget how easy and hassle-free holiday shopping can be at All Seasons. We have a great selection of gifts for any bird or nature lover on your list.

Whether it be gifts for family members or you just need a last minute hostess gift for that party you were just invited to, we’ve got you covered!

SEASONAL CHECKLIST

NOV. & DEC. Early Winter

- Swap several smaller feeders with one or two large-capacity feeders, like the Mandarin Sky Café or Aspects® Quick Clean® Big Tube feeder.
- Add an extension to your pole system to prepare for winter snow depth while also preventing deer and squirrels from raiding the feeder.
- Move some feeders to the deck rail bracket hangers for easy filling and close-up viewing.
- Add dried or live mealworms for a high-protein boost.
- Avoid shell debris under the feeders by using no-shell food, like Kracker Jax, Medium Chips, #1 Select Chips or whole sunflower hearts.
- Put out an extra-large suet feeder to save on refilling trips.
- Install a heated birdbath to provide water to thirsty birds all season. Use Carol’s Dry, Dry Birdie insert to prevent the birds from bathing. Keep the heated birdbath full and fresh.
- Feed goldfinches (now in their mustard brown winter plumage) Nyjer™, Finches’ Choice, Nyjer & Chips, golden safflower, or Songbird Delight.
- Provide Peanut Pickouts and in-shell peanuts as energy food for chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers and Blue Jays.
- Sprinkle Finches’ Choice on the ground for juncos, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows.
One of the best ways to attract birds any time of the year—especially in the winter—is by providing water. All birds need water every day, and open water sources are difficult for birds to find in winter. Providing water will not only attract a larger quantity of birds to your yard, but will also attract birds that wouldn’t otherwise visit feeding stations (Cedar Waxwings, American Robins, etc).

Why Water?
You might wonder, “Why provide water, when there’s an abundance of snow everywhere?” The answer is simply that it takes a lot of energy for birds to convert snow to water. And with shorter days, cold nights and a lack of natural food sources, energy is a resource in short supply for birds.

Keep Water from Freezing
Once you make the decision to provide water for your birds, you’ll quickly realize that chilly temperatures turn your birdbath into more of a skating rink than a pool. And unless you want to trek outside several times a day to douse your birdbath with steaming hot water, you’ll need a birdbath heater.

Birdbath heaters don’t really “heat” the water; they simply keep it from freezing. The heating elements in most heated baths and inserts are thermostatically controlled, so it turns on only when the temperature of the water is below a certain temperature. When it’s really cold—like Minnesota cold—ice may build up around the edges of a heated birdbath, but the center will remain open. Heated birdbath options fall into a couple of categories: you can purchase a birdbath with the heating element built in, or you can add a heating element to an existing birdbath.

Built-In Birdbath Heaters
The advantages of birdbaths with a built-in heating element are that the heater cannot fall out of the bath and that they can be used year-round by simply unplugging the cord.

Some built-in heated birdbaths clamp or screw onto a deck railing. Our Erva deck-mounted heated birdbath is popular with customers. It comes with all the hardware to either clamp it onto a deck or screw into a post, and even has short legs if you’d like to use it as a ground bath.

We also carry styles of built-in heated birdbaths that include their own poles, stands and pedestals.

Add-In Heating Elements
If you already have a birdbath that you like, you can add a heating element or de-icer. Heating elements come in different wattages, from 50 Watts to 150 Watts. The wattage needed depends on the size of the birdbath and the temperature.

A word of caution: not all birdbaths can be used during the cold winter. For example, some concrete birdbaths crack when exposed to freezing/thawing moisture.

It’s also not recommended to use a heating element in metal birdbaths, since the heating element can accelerate the corrosion of some metals.

Useful Accessories
Most heated birdbaths and heating elements have a short cord to ensure it stays above the snow line. Because of this, you’ll need an outdoor GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) outlet and a good, heavy-duty extension cord.

We suggest that you cover the cord connection between the heater plug and the extension cord to protect it from moisture. Try our Cord Connect™ product, which easily snaps around the cord connection.

It costs just pennies a day to provide water for the birds and enjoyment for you all winter long.

BIRDS IN HOLIDAY LORE

Some believe that hanging a cardinal on your Christmas tree brings good luck for the coming year. Cardinals are also a symbol of hope.

The 17th century song, The Twelve days of Christmas, is full of birds and symbols representing them. The five gold rings refer to Ring-necked Pheasants. Four “calling birds” is a misnomer for “colly”, or blackbirds.
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Concentrate Your Efforts
Suet is a wonderful, concentrated source of energy for winter feeding. Whether in cake, plug or pellet form, suet attracts beautiful chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers. Cardinals love it, too, as long as they have a place to perch while eating it.

Consider swapping your single cake suet feeder in the winter for a double cake feeder or a 3-lb suet cage. Try the Pine Tree Farms 3-lb. suet cake with a large Birdola feeder. These larger sources of suet will last longer, giving you time to finish wrapping presents and bake cookies for the neighbors.

Make Feeding a Piece of Cake!
If you’ve never tried pressed seed, this is the season. These jumbo sized cylinders, or cakes, are made with black oil sunflower seeds and pecans held together with a natural binder. Birds peck at the seed to loosen bits that they like, while the remainder of the seed cake remains intact. Seed cakes are a long-lasting option and are easy to hang from a tree or pole close to the house.

What about the squirrels? We stock a seed and whole corn cylinder just for them, packaged in a ready to hang mesh bag. Sit back and chuckle at their antics, because laughter is a great stress reliever!

Double Up
Another idea I’ve heard from many customers is to purchase duplicate feeders and keep one in the garage, clean and ready to fill while hanging the other. The plan is to simply replace an empty feeder with a clean, full one instead of taking down and filling your feeder on the spot or removing and cleaning it. This replacement method frees your time so you can tackle feeder filling and cleaning on your schedule and in a warm place. Sure beats hauling seed scoops or bins through the drifts!

Use these tips to reap all the benefits of watching happy birds and enjoy the season. Now that’s a gift you can give to yourself!

Have an idea for a future issue of Birds-Eye View? Photos and articles may be submitted by email to info@wildbirdstore.net. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter at WildBirdStore.com to receive information about backyard birding, store events and exclusive discounts.