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BIRD'S-EYE *View*

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Squirrel-deterrents **Feed Birds for a Healthy New Year?** *Seasonal Notes*

FEATURE ARTICLE

By Minnetonka Manager **CAROL CHENAULT**

Hot Stuff!

Hot pepper products to deter squirrels are available at All Seasons Wild Bird Stores.

Why Hot Pepper Products Work

Birds lack the pain receptors that mammals have to trigger a burning sensation from capsaicin, the compound that makes peppers hot.

Birds and wild peppers have a mutually beneficial relationship. Birds eat the pepper's fruit and then disperse the seeds, propagating more wild pepper plants. Turkeys, thrashers, thrushes, cardinals, Cedar Waxwings, and others have been seen eating the fruits of various pepper plants in the wild.

Available in a Range of Products

Each of our neighborhood stores offers a variety of products to choose from. Hot pepper has been pre-added to suet cakes, suet plugs,

suet nuggets, loose seed, and seed compressed with gelatin into bells, cakes, and cylinders.

You can also add Fire Mix powder or Flaming Squirrel Seed Sauce to your seed at home. Be sure to wear gloves and wash your hands and face after handling.



Stay cozy *while we* keep your feeders full!

Try our Store-to-Door Services

Winter in Minnesota can be a wonderland—but braving icy roads or trudging through a snowy yard to keep your feeders full? Not so much. Whether you're hunkering down at home or heading south for a sunny escape, we've got the perfect solution to keep your feathered friends happy and well-fed!

What Can We Do for You?

1. Convenient Home Delivery

Skip the hassle and let us bring your bird seed and supplies straight to your door. Place your order online or give us a call at **(952) 473-4283**—we'll handle the rest.

2. Subscribe to Our Feed-and-Fill Program

Want to take the guesswork out of feeder

maintenance? With our Feed-and-Fill program, we visit your home at regular intervals to refill and maintain your feeders, ensuring they're always in top shape. Call **(952) 473-4283** to sign up!

3. Vacation Feed-and-Fill Service

Heading out of town? With our Vacation Feed-and-Fill program, you can relax knowing your feeders will be refilled and cared for while you're away. Call **(952) 473-4283** to schedule this temporary service.

Why Choose Store-to-Door?

Our services cover the entire Twin Cities 7-County Metro Area, offering peace of mind



and maximum convenience. Whether you're avoiding the cold or ensuring your backyard visitors are cared for while you're traveling, we're here to help. A small labor and delivery fee ensures top-notch service without any extra hassle.

Our customers *love* this service, and we're thrilled to make winter bird feeding easy and stress-free for you. Ready to simplify your birding routine? Give us a call today!

Al and Dave Netten

and the All Seasons Wild Bird Store Team

Feeding Birds: Benefits

Access to feeders lowers the birds' stress levels and increases their body condition, which helps them survive the winters. Survival rates are 38% higher in areas where bird feeders were present.

Millikin University (2011-2013)

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

By Guest Contributor **MELISSA BLOCK** and Minnetonka Store Manager **CAROL CHENAULT**

How do birds stay warm in the winter?

Backyard birds use both physical and behavioral adaptations to help them make it through our harsh winters.

Physical Adaptations

- Most birds grow extra feathers in the fall to provide additional insulation for the winter. They also fluff up their feathers to create extra air pockets for warmth.
- Birds' legs and feet are covered with specialized scales that minimize heat loss, making them less susceptible to freezing.
- Some birds enter a state of torpor to conserve energy during winter nights. Torpor is a state of reduced metabolism that requires fewer calories to maintain proper body temperature.

Behavioral Adaptations

- Birds feed heavily just before dusk to build up fat reserves, providing energy to get through the cold nights.

- Birds may stand on one leg or crouch to cover both legs with feathers. Some birds tuck their bills into their shoulder feathers for warmth.
- Birds also shiver to raise their metabolic rate and generate body heat as a short-term solution to the cold. This behavior requires more calories and leaves them frantically searching for food in the early morning.
- Some small birds, especially chickadees, gather in flocks at night and crowd together in a small, tight space to share body heat. They'll roost in shrubbery, evergreens, and even empty birdhouses. There are specialized roosting boxes designed for this purpose, available at any of our stores.

Try this: Provide a Roosting Box

Give your birds a warm, secure shelter this winter! We recommend the small roosting box



from Kettle Moraine. Inside, the perches are perfectly situated for accessibility and comfort. The copper portal provides a stylish yet functional entrance, keeping larger birds and

predators out.

This box, like others we sell, is constructed from solid cedar and uses stainless steel hardware for long-lasting protection against wind, rain, and snow. ■

Rx: Birds

Is feeding birds the prescription for a happy, healthy New Year?

I'll admit, there have been times when it's cold or rainy outside that I haven't been quick to refill my backyard bird feeders. I'd avoid looking out the windows or tell myself, "I'll get to it tomorrow." But then I'd observe a cardinal hopping from port to port on a tube feeder, searching for seed. In minutes, I'd be pulling on my boots and shrugging into my jacket to go fill the feeders. Why? Because nothing is sadder to me than an empty feeder. Conversely, nothing brings me a greater sense of satisfaction and well-being than seeing my feeders bustling with birds!

While my experience of achieving a positive mental reset from feeding birds is purely anecdotal, it turns out researchers are documenting how the activity of bird feeding is tied to a sense of well-being.

Surveying People Who Feed Birds

Researchers Daniel Cox and Kevin Gaston (2016) conducted surveys to explore people's attitudes toward backyard bird feeding. They found that most respondents reported that watching birds in their yards made them feel relaxed and connected to nature.

Further, Cox and Gaston discovered that these feelings of well-being increased in people who noticed birds around them for a greater portion of the day and in those who fed birds regularly.

Perhaps taking a cue from this research study, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch program now includes two places to enter data about the observer's emotional states while conducting their monthly bird feeder surveys.

Observing Birds and Tracking Emotional Well-Being via Smartphone App

In a 2020 study, Hammoud et al. concluded that the act of bird feeding is positively associated with significant increases in

people's sense of connection to nature.

Building on this study in 2022, Hammoud et al. examined the impact of seeing or hearing birds on self-reported mental well-being. They asked study participants to track their sense of well-being on a smartphone app in real time when they saw or heard birds.

The data revealed that seeing or hearing birds through activities such as feeding can cause robust improvements to participants' mental well-being—improvements that last up to eight hours beyond the initial bird encounter.

Bird Sounds Show Restorative Effects

I love to crack open the window on spring and summer mornings to listen to the dawn chorus. It turns out this habit is beneficial to the psyche: a 2013 study in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* found that, of all the natural sounds one might hear, people were most likely to associate birdsong with stress recovery and attention restoration.

Further research by Dr. Eleanor Ratcliffe at the University of Surrey (2020) found that some bird sounds offered relief from mental fatigue and stress, particularly those that are quiet, high-frequency, or melodically complex.

A Historical Perspective: The Great Depression and the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the book *Feeding Wild Birds in America*, bird feeding as a hobby grew during the Great Depression. Many Americans were sticking close to home in the 1930s, and their bird feeders provided a relatively affordable source of comfort as well as a small slice of nature they could enjoy.

A similar situation of isolation at home led bird feeding to grow as a hobby during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Wild Bird Feeding Institute (WBF) reported in 2021 that there



was a measurable boom in birdseed sales during and after the pandemic, strongly suggesting that bird feeding fulfills a human need for connection with nature.

The Importance of Connecting with Nature

When I feed the birds in my backyard, I feel a connection with nature. I'm watching, hearing, and nurturing the birds that visit my feeders.

Numerous studies demonstrate that connecting with nature unlocks psychological benefits, such as resetting from task-driven fatigue (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1992), improved memory (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008), increased problem-solving skills and creative abilities (Atchley, Strayer, & Atchley, 2012), and a reduction in risk factors and burdens of some types of mental illness (Bratman et al., 2019)—plus many more.

My 2025 New Year's Resolution

This year, I vow not to procrastinate filling my feeders. After all, I've learned—both anecdotally and through scientific research—that keeping feeders filled is not only good for the birds; it's also good for me!

■

January & February

Find tips and seasonal updates online!

instagram: @allseasonswildbirdstore
 facebook.com/allseasonswildbirdstore
 youtube.com/@allseasonswildbirdstore

For a healthy, happy New Year, contact the Ridge Square store to subscribe to our Feed-and-Fill program for those who are not able to fill their own feeders. We'll visit their home at regular intervals to refill and maintain their feeders, ensuring feeders are always in top shape. Call **(952) 473-4283** to sign up!

The Finch Forecast for this 2025 winter indicates a poor crop of cones in north-western Ontario, west of Lake Superior. As a result, the metro could have more Purple Finches, Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls joining goldfinches at feeders. The forecast is compiled by Tyler Hoar.



Keep feeders filled with Nyjer® and Nyjer® mixes, ensuring the seed is fresh. Empty any feeders that have been exposed to the weather for six weeks, scattering the old seed on the ground for Dark-eyed Juncos and native sparrows, and refill the feeders with fresh seed.

We offer a range of squirrel-detererring products that contain hot pepper. Birds, having few taste buds, are not bothered by the hot pepper added to the seed. Additionally, we carry a line of weight-activated Squirrel Buster feeders that block access to the food under the weight of a squirrel.

Did you know an adult gray squirrel can eat 40 pounds of acorns in a winter?

They will also eat cob corn, Critter Crunch and Nut'n Sweet Corn Squirrelogs. Stop in your neighborhood store to see squirrel feeders and food.



Red-breasted Nuthatches, permanent residents in the northeast and north-central regions, will visit suet, peanut and seed feeders in central and eastern Minnesota during the winter. Add suet nuggets to hoppers, trays and fly-through feeders.



Pileated Woodpeckers prefer the recycled double suet feeder. The extended "tail prop" provides space to prop their stiff tail feathers and allows them better leverage for pecking at the suet cakes. The feeder is easy to fill and to clean.



Provide a clean water source with a heated birdbath, and use Bird Bath Protector™ to keep the water clean and fresh. Refill the birdbath with cold water regularly to reduce evaporation.



The Great Gray Owl, Minnesota's largest owl, stands 2 feet tall and has a wingspan of 5 feet. These owls are most often seen within 100 miles of the Canadian border, though some winters they can be spotted as far south as southern Minnesota. Watch for them plunging from low perches into the snow—they can hear rodents moving beneath it!

The Great Backyard Bird Count collects information about bird populations in the winter. Get more information and find out how you can participate at birdcount.org.



Your photos spark conversations, inform customers and staff about what you're seeing and when, and inspire a sense of community. We'd love to include your photos in our displays within the store and online. Send your bird photos to carol@wildbirdstore.net

Signs that spring is slowly awakening in the bold north: goldfinches begin molting and males are becoming more yellow. European Starling bills are returning to yellow, Horned Larks return to farm fields and ditches, bird sounds increase and oak leaves begin to fall. We start dreaming of gardening. Our **Landscaping for Birds** flyer is available in our stores or online at wildbirdstore.com.