

# Feeding Winter Birds

*It's a frosty morning in January & a surprising number of wild birds are toughing out the northern winter. Up to 130 species have been sighted in the coastal region during the holiday season - cheerful signs of life in gardens when all else lies dormant.*

*Feeding wild birds in winter supplements their diet at a time of year when natural food sources are sparse. If we want to enjoy the antics of chickadees or Steller's Jays from the kitchen window, a well-placed feeder is a must. If we want wild birds in our increasingly urban environment, we have to invite them in! By including plants in the landscape that provide winter forage & by consistently stocking winter feeders, we can welcome our hardy 'feathered friends' into our home landscape.*



## consistency: start to finish

- Wild birds are creatures of habit & will come to rely on us as a food source. Natural foods are abundant throughout the fall harvest season so there's no need to supplement them too early. In fact, delay 'cleaning up' the garden until the birds have busied themselves among the ripening seedheads. Wild birds scorn immaculate gardeners.
- After the first frost, feeders can be strategically placed. The year's conditions will determine how often you'll be required to restock. Generally the heaviest feeding occurs after sudden drops in temperature & during snowstorms or heavy snowcover (a possibility on the North Shore). Feeders should remain in supply until a couple of weeks after the last frost; this feeding period being critical as females build strength for spring breeding & nesting.

Factors to consider when choosing a location for your feeder:

- 1 Winter birds need food & shelter so give them both! Choose a sheltered area away from prevailing winds & driving rain (a definite possibility on the North Shore!).
- 2 Evergreens & shrubs in the vicinity will provide refuge for flitting to & fro.
- 3 Fences & other structures within 3 m (10 feet) of feeders will provide 'leaping access' for cats & squirrels.
- 4 Visibility from your cozy kitchen window.

## detering cats & squirrels



- 1 Mount feeders on metal pipe or greased wooden posts so climbers cannot gain purchase.
- 2 Place an inverted metal cone on post below feeder to create a 'dead-end' for climbers.
- 3 Hang feeders on clothesline & string pie plate 'wheels' on either side to deter tightrope walkers.
- 4 Keep cats inside during peak feeding periods.

## what's for lunch?

A blend of seeds & nuts will attract a 'blend' of different birds. Most birds love sunflower seeds so any mix containing these will satisfy the masses. Remember, those tiny balls of fluff have voracious appetites so maintain a generous back-up supply.

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## a little grit for the gullet

Birds require grit to digest their food. Sprinkle some sand - 3mm size grains or less - on the floor of the feeder or crushed eggshells.

## for your information...

table scraps attract larger birds such as starlings, jays, gulls & crows....all birds love white bread (white is an attractor) but it has low food value.

## did you know? ...

Sunflower hulls contain a substance that inhibits the growth of plants so don't toss them into the compost!

## a word about water

We like coffee after dinner...birds like a beverage too. Freezing temperatures make open water sources more difficult to maintain, so choose a plastic container that makes it easy to 'bang out' ice. Place some rough perching stones in a simple plastic drainage saucer filled with no more than 2.5" of water & set out, especially if we experience a winter dry spell.

## maintenance

Take the time to clean out your feeder periodically, especially if stormy weather challenges its water proofing. Damp seed is quick to develop fungi that can cause infections, & natural bird parasites may accumulate. Some people rinse feeders with a mild solution of bleach. Remove debris from below feeder as well.

## fall & winter forage plants

### groundcovers with berries....

*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (kinnickinnick)

*Cotoneaster* species

*Fragaria* species (strawberries)

*Maianthemums* species (false lily-of-the-valley & solomon's seal)

*Vaccinium vitis-idaea* (lingonberry)

### shrubs with berries....

*Gaultheria shallon* (salal)

*Ilex* species (holly)

*Mahonia* species (oregon grape)

*Pyracantha coccinea* (firethorn)

*Ribes sanguineum* (red-flowering currant)

*Rosa* species (wild roses with hips)

*Sambucus* species (elderberry)

*Vaccinium* species (evergreen huckleberry & blueberries)

### trees with berries & seeds...

*Acer circinatum* (vine maple)

*Cornus* species (dogwood)

*Pseudotsuga menziesii* (douglas fir)

*Rhus typhina* (sumac)

*Thuja plicata* (western red cedar)

*Tsuga heterophylla* (western hemlo)

## common winter birds on the b.c. coast

California Quail

Anna's Hummingbird

Northern Flicker

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Steller's Jay

Black-capped Chickadee

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Bewick's Wren

American Robin

Varied Thrush

Evening Grosbeak

Purple Finch

House Finch

Pine Siskin

American Goldfinch

Rufous-sided Towhee

Dark-eyed Junco

White-crowned Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

Song Sparrow

(list compiled from 'Attracting Backyard Wildlife' by Bill Merilees).



 **maple leaf**  
garden centres

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