

# **Homemade Bird Food Recipes**

By Susan Kelly

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# Introduction

My first experience feeding wild birds was tossing breadcrumbs to ducks at the town pond. I was very young, but I can remember that feeding one duck quickly turned into feeding 20 ducks. I don't know if I realized it then, but I learned that birds are drawn to areas where other birds are feeding. You can see this for yourself by placing a few bird feeders in your backyard.

I set up my first bird feeder about 10 years ago. I can remember it seemed to take forever for the first bird to arrive. But once the birds found my feeder, it was just like the ducks when I was a child – more and more birds came every day. I was filling that bird feeder almost daily. So naturally I added more and more feeders.

I was attracting chickadees, nuthatches, wrens, juncos, sparrows, titmice and a few woodpeckers. I was happy with all the activity around my feeders, but I knew there were other birds in my area that were not visiting my feeders. I had seen blue jays, mourning doves, cardinals, hummingbirds and pileated woodpeckers. So why weren't they visiting my feeders? I discovered that different types of food attract different types of birds.

I began buying different types of bird food only to discover that in some cases they required specialized feeders. Great, now I had to buy more feeders! So I bought bags of bird food labeled "For Cardinals" or "Attract Woodpeckers" and anything else that looked like it would attract birds.

Well a few more birds came, but what I noticed was more discarded seed on the ground below my feeders. As I looked closer I saw I wasn't just seed but also little pieces of corn. I didn't realize I was feeding corn to the birds. When I looked at the ingredients on the package, I saw that most of the seed mix was corn which was being tossed out by the birds. Not only was it making a mess, but also I was wasting my money. That was when I decided to start making bird food to attract specific birds.

This collection of homemade bird food recipes will help you attract more birds while actually spending less of your hard earned money. Making your own bird food is a lot of fun, too. If you have kids, let them help you prepare the bird food. They will be more interested in watching birds eat food that they helped make than some seed from a bag.

I know you will enjoy these recipes as much as I have.

Happy Birding,

Susan

[www.a-home-for-wild-birds.com](http://www.a-home-for-wild-birds.com)

## **Why Make Your Own Bird Food?**

Homemade bird food is an economical way to target specific wild birds. It also provides a way to meet the seasonal dietary needs of birds.

Did you know that small birds must maintain a body temperature of 105°? This makes foods that are high in fat and calories, such as suet and nuts, very important in the winter.

You may be surprised to find that many common items in your kitchen can be used to supplement the dietary requirements of wild birds.

You can use bread, cornbread, donuts, bagels, oatmeal, cornmeal, peanut butter, peanuts, mixed nuts, cheese, fruit, dried fruit, shortening plus many other items from your kitchen.

Try different items, mix some together and see what works best for you. You may be surprised at all the wild birds that are attracted to your creations.

Here are some common food items and the birds that can be attracted using them.

### **Bread Products:**

Wrens, mockingbirds, thrashers, sparrows, warblers, tanagers, titmice, towhees, creepers, robins, blackbirds, kinglets, cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, chickadees, bluebirds and thrushes.

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### **Rendered Suet (also lard or shortening):**

Woodpeckers, wrens, warblers, tanagers, nuthatches, creepers, chickadees, orioles, titmice, mockingbirds, cardinals, finches, bluebirds, grosbeaks and buntings.

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### **Peanuts and Peanut Butter:**

Woodpeckers, wrens, warblers, nuthatches, creepers, chickadees, titmice, mockingbirds, finches, grosbeaks and juncos.

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### **Berries:**

Wax wings, robins, bluebirds, thrushes.

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### **Raisins and Currents:**

Wax wings, orioles, robins, bluebirds and thrushes.

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### **Nuts:**

Creepers, towhees, juncos, thrashers, mockingbirds, warblers and woodpeckers.

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### **Apples:**

Wax wings, mockingbirds, thrashers, wrens, grosbeaks, buntings and cardinals.

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### **Other Fruits:**

Tanagers, orioles, woodpeckers, mockingbirds, thrashers, warblers, cardinals, grosbeaks, and finches.

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One of my greatest joys has been teaching my children about nature through bird watching. I found that one of the best places to get them

interested in bird watching was my backyard. I used these recipes and projects to get them involved in feeding the birds. They seem to be more interested in watching the birds eat food that they made than just some seed from a bag. To add even more fun to our recipes we use seasonal molds and cookie cutters to shape the bird food.

When making your own bird food, **JUST HAVE FUN!** Try different mixes and see what happens. It can be very satisfying when you discover a blend that attracts wild birds that you have never had at your feeder.

# Seeds and Grains for Birds

Different birds are attracted to different kinds of bird seed and bird food. The best way to attract a wide variety of birds is to use a variety of bird seed and bird food. The most common wild bird food used today is bird seed. There are many kinds of bird seed containing one specific kind of seed or as a combination of different types of seed.

Always be sure to choose a high quality wild bird seed. You should avoid cheaper mixtures that contain large amounts of buckwheat, rice, oats, milo, flax, rapeseed, cracked corn and canary seed. Here is a list of some of the most common seeds and the birds that are attracted to them.

## **Black-Oil Sunflower Seed**

Black-oil sunflower seed is the most common type of seed offered at bird feeders in North America. If you are new to backyard birding this is the seed you want to use. Most seed eating birds can't resist it.

This small sunflower seed is high in energy and has thin shells, making it the preferred food item for a wide variety of birds. You can attract many species of wild birds with black-oil sunflower seed including: woodpeckers, finches, goldfinches, northern cardinals, evening grosbeaks, pine grosbeaks, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and grackles.

## **Striped Sunflower Seed**

Striped sunflower seeds are larger and thicker-shelled than black-oil sunflower. These seeds are frequently found in seed mixes. Striped sunflower seed can be used to attract large-billed birds capable of cracking the large shells. You can attract many species of wild birds with striped sunflower seed including: woodpeckers, northern cardinals, evening grosbeaks, pine grosbeaks, jays, and grackles.

## **Nyjer Seed (thistle)**

Often called "thistle" seed, nyjer seed is not related to North American thistle plants. This little seed is high in calories and has high oil content, making it a high-energy food source. It is extremely desirable to birds

adapted to eating tiny seeds such as the American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin and Common Redpoll.

### **Safflower Seed**

Safflower seed resembles a white sunflower seed. They are small, white and loaded with fat and protein. Many backyard birds can be attracted using safflower – including Northern Cardinals, Chickadees, House Finches, Mourning Doves, some Woodpeckers, Tufted Titmice and Whit-breasted Nuthatches. However, in my experience, most birds prefer sunflower seeds to safflower.

### **Millet**

Millet is a small, round grain commonly found in seed mixes. Many similar, ground foraging birds can be attracted using millet. A handful of millet spread out on the ground will keep your juncos and sparrows happy.

### **Milo**

Milo is a reddish-coloured, round grain that is often a major component of economical bird seed mixes. Unfortunately, most birds will not eat it, and the seed is often wasted. Some western birds will accept milo but most birds in the east will not eat it. It is best to avoid seed mixes with large amounts of milo.

### **Corn**

Corn is an economical grain that can be used to feed many species of wild birds. Whole corn, either on the husk or off, can be fed to Wild Turkeys, ducks and jays. Cracked corn will attract doves, quail, and sparrows.

### **Bird Seed Mixes**

Many commercial birdseed mixes are available. Many backyard birders use seed mixes in their platform feeders or spread right on the ground. Try mixes containing millet, cracked corn, and sunflower seed to attract sparrows, juncos, doves, and quail.

You should always check the list of ingredients on the bag when buying birdseed mixes. Many inexpensive blends will contain high amounts of milo

and corn. Most seed eating birds will dig through the wanted seed, throwing it to the ground, to find sunflower seeds. If you can't find a blend that suits your needs, make your own.

## **What is Suet?**

Suet is raw beef fat, usually the fat found around the loins and kidneys. Suet is high fat content and provides the calories that are needed to keep the birds warm in the winter.

Suet bird food can be used to attract a wide variety of insect eating birds including: woodpeckers, chickadees, juncos, nuthatches, titmice, flickers, sapsuckers, mockingbirds, brown creepers, sparrows, robins, wrens, kinglets, catbirds and bluebirds.

Suet should be used to attract birds throughout the year. It provides the extra energy needed for nest building in the spring and is also a good source of food for young birds. I've seen parent birds actually feeding suet to young birds while still in their nest.

One important fact about suet is that if the temperature outside is around 70 degrees Fahrenheit or warmer, un-rendered beef can turn rancid and melt.

If you plan on using suet bird food all year around you can buy commercial suet cakes, but make sure they are marked "no melt".

If you want to have some fun, try making your own suet bird food by using rendered suet.

### **How to render suet:**

You can purchase suet at your local supermarket or from a butcher shop. It is usually sold in large pieces. If you ask the butcher to grind the suet, it will speed up the process of melting.

Put the suet into a pan and turn on low heat. If possible use an electric skillet (overheated fat can catch fire). If you are using your stovetop it is best to use an oversize pan.

After the suet melts, pour it through fine cheesecloth into a heatproof container. Then discard the pieces that did not melt. Allow the melted suet to re-harden, either in the fridge or on the counter top. The suet

needs to be melted, strained and hardened 2 – 3 times before it is ready to use. If you don't do this, the suet will not cake properly.

After the suet has cooled, but not yet solidified, you can stir in your desired ingredients. Then pour the mixture into molds or containers suitable for your suet feeder.

# Suet Recipes

## Sweet Cherry Treat

### You will need:

- 2 cups of rendered suet
- 1 ½ cups of chunky peanut butter
- 1 cup of dried cherries
- 1 cup of sunflower seed hearts
- 1 cup of crushed graham crackers
- 1 ½ cups of oatmeal

In a large bowl, add the chunky peanut butter to the rendered suet while it is still warm. Once the peanut butter is melted, add the cherries and the sunflower seed hearts. Then stir in the crushed graham crackers and oatmeal. After all of the ingredients are thoroughly mixed, put the mixture into molds or on a cookie sheet to cool.

## Berries Berries Berries

### You will need:

- 3 cups of rendered suet
- 1 ½ cups of chunky peanut butter
- 1 cup of mixed dried berries. Strawberries, blueberries, cherries and cranberries.
- 1 cup of sunflower seed hearts
- 1 cup of oatmeal
- ½ cup of corn muffin mix

In a large bowl, add the chunky peanut butter to the rendered suet while it is still warm. Once the peanut butter is melted, add the dried berries and the sunflower seed hearts. Then stir in the oatmeal and corn muffin mix. After all of the ingredients are thoroughly mixed, put the mixture into molds or on a cookie sheet to cool.

## **Peanut Butter Cakes**

Wild birds love peanut butter and suet. This recipe combines both. These bird treats are easy to make and a great project for kids.

### **You will need:**

- 1 cup of rendered suet
- 1 cup of chunky peanut butter
- 6 cups of cornmeal
- 1 muffin tin with paper liners

While the suet is still warm, add the chunky peanut butter and stir until melted. Then stir in the cornmeal.

Spoon the mixture into the paper-lined muffin tins. Allow them to cool at room temperature or place them in the refrigerator. They can even be frozen until needed.

You can add any combination of sunflower seeds, raisins, chopped fruit or nuts to spice up your mixture of wild bird food.

## **Nuts About Nuts**

### **You will need:**

- 3 cups rendered suet
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of nuts (walnuts, pecans or unsalted mixed nuts)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup shelled sunflower seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of crunchy peanut butter

In a large bowl, add the chunky peanut butter to the rendered suet while it is still warm. Once the peanut butter is melted, add the nuts and the sunflower seed hearts. After all of the ingredients are thoroughly mixed, put the mixture into molds or on a cookie sheet to cool.

## **Joyful Jelly**

### **You will need:**

- 3 cups of rendered suet
- 1 cup of jelly (apple or grape)
- 1 cup of peanut butter

Add the peanut butter to the melted suet. As the suet cools, before it hardens, add the jelly. Stir until combined. Pour the mixture into molds and cool.

## **Tropical Treat**

### **You will need:**

- 3 cups of rendered suet
- 1 cup of peanut butter
- 1 cup of brown sugar
- 1 cup of dried fruit (raisins or cherries)
- 1 cup of mixed nuts
- ½ cup of cornmeal
- 1 coconut, halved

Add the peanut butter, brown sugar, dried fruit and nuts to the melted suet. Stir until combined. If the mixture is too loose, add cornmeal to thicken. Pour the mixture into the coconut halves and let cool. Drill a hole in the coconut shells and use twine to hang.

## **Wild Bird Cupcakes**

### **You will need:**

- 3 cups of rendered suet
- 1 cup of chunky peanut butter
- 1 cup of uncooked oatmeal
- 2 cups of mixed bird seed or sunflower seed
- 1 cup of cornmeal

Mix ingredients into warm suet before it hardens, stir to combine. Spoon the mixture into a paper lined cupcake pan. Cool the cupcakes until hard. Once they are hard, place them in your suet feeders or hang in an onion bag or mesh sack. You can freeze any extra cupcakes until you need them.

## **Suet Balls**

### **You will need:**

- 2 cups of stale bread or unflavoured bread crumbs
- 2 cups of rendered suet
- 2 chopped apples
- 1 cup of chunky peanut butter
- 1 cup of black-oil sunflower seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of raisins
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of mixed, chopped nuts

Mix all ingredients (except the black-oil sunflower seeds) into warm suet before it hardens. Stir to combine. The next step is messy but fun. Shape about a handful of the mixture into a ball. Roll the ball in the sunflower seeds and press them into place. Allow them to cool until hard before using. Hang the balls in onion bags or mesh sacks.

## **Birdie Granola**

### **You will need:**

- 1 cup of granola flakes
- 1 cup of dried fruit, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of peanuts finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup rendered and hardened suet
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of corn or peanut oil

Use your hands to mix all ingredients in a large bowl, I know it is messy but it will be more fun. Crumble and serve in a platform bird feeder.

## **Chickadee Fuel**

### **You will need:**

- 2 cups of rendered suet
- 1 cup sunflower meats
- 2 cups of mixed nuts, chopped
- 1 cup of peanuts, chopped

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl while suet is still warm. Spread mixture onto a large cookie sheet and freeze. Once frozen, break into small pieces and serve in a platform feeder.

# No-Suet Recipes

## Tasty Oat Crumble

### You will need:

- 1 cup of Roman Meal
- 1 cup of uncooked oatmeal
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup of whole milk
- 1 tablespoon of molasses
- 1 tablespoon of cooking oil
- ½ cup of raisins or chopped fruit if desired

Blend all ingredients together in a bowl. Pour mixture onto a cookie sheet about ¾" thick. Bake in oven at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until golden brown. After it cools, crumble into pieces and feed using a platform feeder.

## Feathered Friends Raisin Bread

### You will need:

- 1 cup of whole-wheat flour
- 1 cup of wheat germ
- 1 cup of raw oatmeal
- 1 cup of cornmeal
- 1 cup of raisins
- 1 cup of milk
- ½ cup of cooking oil
- ½ tsp baking soda

Combine all ingredients to form a thick batter. Add breadcrumbs if needed to thicken. Add batter to a greased pan and bake at 350 degrees for about an hour. After the bread cools, crumble into small pieces and serve in a platform bird feeder.

# Fruit Bird Food Recipes

Feeding fruit to wild birds can be as simple as chopping up an apple for a platform feeder or slicing an orange to put in a caged suet feeder. Here are a few other ways to offer fruit to our feathered friends.

## Wild Bird Shish Kabob

**Ingredients:** apples, oranges, pears, grapes, prunes, dried fruit, berries, summer squash or any other fresh fruits that you have around your kitchen or garden.

Slice the larger items into manageable sizes and poke a hole in the centre of each piece. Then tie a large knot in one end of a 3 to 4 foot piece of twine. Run the twine through your fruits and vegetables.

Simply hang your stringed treats over a tree branch and watch as your feathered friends feast on your new offering.

## September Harvest

This is another homemade wild bird food recipe that I know you will enjoy. Many migratory birds that eat fruit will be tempted to linger at your feeders if you offer the following mix. Use a platform style feeder when offering this wild bird food mix.

### You will need:

- 2 cups of dried, chopped apples (dried apples will not get moldy as fast)
- 2 cups of raisins
- 2 cups of chopped nuts (almonds, walnuts or any nuts you have available)
- 1 cup of chopped prunes
- 1 cup of dried melon or squash seeds

Simply mix the ingredients together in a large bowl or bucket. Start by adding small amounts to your feeder and store the rest in a paper bag in a

cool and dry location. Now your homemade wild bird food is ready to serve.

# Nectar Recipes

I use nectar to attract two species of wild birds, orioles and hummingbirds.

Hummingbirds have two food sources, insects (spiders and tiny flying insects) and nectar. In order to gather enough nectar, hummingbirds must visit hundreds of flowers every day. One way you can help make their search for food easier is to put out "nectar" in the form of sugar water.

Use this hummingbird feeder recipe to make your own hummer nectar; it is easy and inexpensive. It is not necessary to purchase commercially produced nectars that have vitamins and minerals added to them. Hummers get all the vitamins and minerals that they need from insects and natural nectar. A simple sugar solution is adequate to supplement their dietary needs.

## **Hummingbird Feeder Recipe:**

### **You will need:**

- 1 – Part Sugar
- 4 – Parts Water

First, bring the water to a boil and then slowly add the sugar. Let it boil for a few minutes then remove from the burner to cool. Store any excess nectar in the refrigerator. Yes, it is that easy!

Hummingbirds cannot smell and depend on their eyesight to seek out flowers and food sources. But do not add food colouring to this hummingbird feeder recipe, it is unnecessary and possibly harmful to the birds. Red portals on the feeders, or even a red ribbon on top, will attract the hummingbirds just as well.

If the hummers are not emptying your feeders, just partially fill them. Definitely don't use artificial sweeteners in the feeders, they have no nutritional value and may be harmful to the birds. NEVER use honey in hummingbird feeders. It readily grows mold that can be dangerous or even fatal to hummingbirds.

## **Oriole Nectar Recipe**

Most orioles spend their winters in Florida, the Caribbean, central Mexico, Central America and the northern part of South America. While there, they enjoy a steady diet of fruit, caterpillars, insects, spiders and nectar.

They return to the United States in the spring for their summer breeding season. When they arrive, they are looking for their favourite foods.

If you are going to use an oriole feeder, consider making your own homemade oriole bird food.

### **Homemade Oriole Bird Food Recipe:**

#### **You will need:**

- 1 part sugar/6 parts water

Bring the water to a boil and then add the sugar. Boil until the sugar has dissolved. 1 part sugar to 6 parts water means that if you boil 2 cups of water you will need 1/3 cup of sugar.

Let the mixture cool before filling your feeder. Store any excess food in your refrigerator until ready to use. There is no need to add food colouring.

Orioles can also be attracted using nuts, suet, and fruits such as oranges, cherries, apples, pears or bananas and even grape jelly.

It is thought that orioles are attracted to the colour orange (the colour of many types of fruit). Try tying orange cloth or ribbon on the feeder to catch their attention. NEVER use honey (which ferments), or artificial sweetener to this homemade oriole bird food recipe.

You can encourage a breeding pair of orioles to build their nest nearby by making some nest building materials often work best when offering foods such as nuts, oranges, cherries, apples, pears or bananas to orioles. But

they should be hung from a tree branch or placed on your deck rail instead of on the ground.

Hang a suet basket, near your feeding station, filled with cat or dog fur, dryer lint, or short pieces (3-4 inches) of natural fibre twine and yarn.

## **Bird Food Crafts**

I love watching wild birds at my feeders. Over the years I have looked for ways to add even more fun to my hobby.

I have found that making things like bird houses and bird feeders is not only fun it but it also saves me a lot of money. Another thing I enjoy is making bird food crafts. Making bird food crafts is something that the whole family can do together.

My kids have gained a new appreciation for nature through bird watching. And making these bird food crafts together is what got them interested in bird watching.

### **Pine Cone Bird Feeder**

The pine cone bird feeder was the first of many bird feeder crafts that I have made with my kids. It is also one of their favourites. I like it for several reasons. It is cheap, easy to make, attracts many birds and the most important reason – it keeps my kids interested in backyard bird watching.

A pine cone bird feeder combines two foods that wild birds love, peanut butter and pine cones. Wild birds are attracted to the tiny seeds that are hidden deep inside pine cones.

You have probably seen the large, pale yellow seed of the pinyon pine, commonly known as a pine nut. Birds love these but they are a little expensive for feeding birds.

The tiny, lightweight seeds of many other pine cones are also popular with foraging birds. The tiny cones produced by hemlocks will attract small birds like chickadees and titmice, while larger pine cones will attract grosbeaks, crossbills and jays.

Peanut butter could be considered the perfect bird food. It is high in fat and full of protein. These are food qualities that are important to wild birds any time of the year. This is especially true in the winter when birds really need a boost.

To make a pine cone bird feeder, you will need pine cones, peanut butter, bird seed and string or wire. Tie the wire at the top before adding the peanut butter, it is less messy this way. Use a knife or spoon to push the peanut butter into all of the openings. Then roll the pine cone in your birdseed. Try to press the seed in to help it stick.

Now select a location, hang it and watch for the birds to flock to your new pine cone bird feeder.

## **Natural Birdseed Wreath**

I love bird feeders, but there is something special about watching birds feed in a more natural setting. An edible bird wreath is a beautiful addition to any backyard bird feeding station. The best thing is that you can easily make your own.

This is a great project to do with kids of any age. Getting children involved in birding is the best way to get them interested in nature.

When following the directions below, don't be afraid to substitute any item for what is available to you. There are many ways to customize your wreath depending on the season or what items are available in your area. You can even make adjustments to attract different wild birds.

I have attracted woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and orioles, just to name a few. In the fall you can use wild grain, corn, wild berries, wild grapes or even flowers like purple coneflowers or sunflowers.

In the spring and summer you can cover it with fresh fruit.

### **You will need:**

- Grape Vine Wreath – You can purchase these at your local craft store for around \$5.00. If you have access to grape vines or willow branches, you can make your own.
- Florist Wire
- Wild Grapes
- Mix of Tall Grass Seed Heads
- Purple Cone flowers
- (2) Dried Sunflower Seed Heads

### **Step One:**

Strip the leaves from the grape vines. Use the florist wire to attach the grapes to the wreath. Spread the grapes out so that they are all around the wreath.

### **Step Two:**

Gather the grass seed and purple coneflower stems together. Trim the stems about three inches longer than the diameter of the wreath. Tie them together using the florist wire.

### **Step Three:**

Attach the grass and flowers to the wreath using the florist wire. Arrange the swag so that the seed heads are hanging down and resting on the wreath.

### **Step Four:**

Use a nail to make two small holes in the sunflower seed heads. Cut two pieces of florist wire about 10 inches long. Push each end of the wire through the holes in the seed head from the top. Then attach the seed heads to the bird seed wreath on each side of the grass stems. Make a loop using the wire and attach it to the back of the wreath to make a hanger.

This is a really fun project that can easily be completed in an afternoon.

Now sit back and enjoy watching your backyard birds feed from a natural bird seed wreath that you created.

## **Milk Jug Bird Feeder**

If you want to get your kids outside this and in touch with nature, then get them interested in bird watching.

One of the best places to expose your kids to the wonderful hobby of birding is your own backyard. Kids love to learn and by nature are curious.

Bird watching is a great way to teach your children about the world of nature around them.

One way to get your kids interested in the bird feeders around your yard is to make them yourself.

Making a milk jug bird feeder is simple and fun. This project can be completed in about 15 minutes.

**You will need:**

- An empty milk carton (a gallon jug)
- Thin wire or strong string
- Scissors
- Marker
- Birdseed
- Markers or paint (optional for decoration)

**Directions:**

Clean carton with hot water and rinse thoroughly.

Outline cutout holes on the two sides away from the handle.

Cut out holes.

Remove cap and wrap wire or string around the base of the opening and replace cap (see photo).

Hang your new milk jug feeder from a tree branch and fill it with birdseed.

That's it you're done!

While a milk jug bird feeder will not last forever, they are a lot of fun to make.

This is an inexpensive way for your children to learn about birds and the importance of caring for our wildlife.

## **Soda Bottle Bird Feeder**

Making a soda bottle bird feeder is a great project you can do with your kids. It will only take about 20 minutes... and best of all it is nearly free!

This project is fun and easy, but is also a great way to get a child interested in bird watching. When your child helps you make a bird feeder, instead of purchasing one, they will be much more interested in the birds that are attracted to the feeder.

Bird watching gets kids outside and interested in the world of nature. There is a natural progression from noticing birds at a bird feeder to keeping a bird list or even a birding journal. Pick up a pair of birding binoculars and a field guide. Then challenge your children to identify the birds that are attracted to "their" bird feeder.

### **You will need:**

- 1 – 2 litre soda bottle
- 2 – 5/16" x 8" dowels (you can use a tree branch if you like)
- 1 – 3' piece of thin solid wire

### **Tools:**

- Drill
- 1/16" drill bit
- 1/8" drill bit
- 5/16" drill bit
- Caulking

### **Procedure:**

Remove the label from the soda bottle, then clean, rinse and dry.

Drill a 1/16" hole (or a size just big enough for your wire to feed through) in the cap and the bottom of the bottle.

With the cap off, feed the wire through the bottom then through the cap (from inside to outside). Replace the cap onto the bottle. Wrap and secure the wire around the neck of the bottle. Make a loop at the end of with at least 4" of wire, in order to hang the bottle.

Drill two 5/16" holes near the bottom of the soda bottle bird feeder (cap end) on opposite sides and drill two more holes 1/2" higher. Position the holes so that the perches cross in the centre. Insert the perches.

Drill or cut holes for the seed.

\*\* For nyjer seed: cut small slots, 1/4"x 1/8", 1 1/2" above each perch.

\*\* For sunflower seed: drill 5/16" holes, 1 1/2: to 2" above each perch.

At first, only fill your new soda bottle bird feeder about half way. This will allow the seed inside to stay fresh until the birds find the new feeder.

Find a spot to hang your feeder that is low enough for your children to see. Then sit back, enjoy the new visitors to your yard. Don't be discouraged if it takes a little time for the birds to locate your new offering. They will soon "flock" to it.

## **Gelatin Bird Seed Wreath**

This bird seed wreath is perfect for winter. Since this project requires the use of gelatin, temperatures should be close to or below freezing. If you live in an area where winter temperatures stay near 50, you can substitute peanut butter or rendered suet for the gelatin.

Making this bird seed wreath is a messy project that can be a lot of fun for kids.

### **You will need:**

- Piece of corrugated cardboard
- Packet of clear gelatin
- 2 quarts of the bird seed of your choice
- Wire for hanging
- Ribbons, bows or any decoration you like

### **Step One:**

Cut a circle out of the cardboard about 10 inches in diameter. Then cut out a centre hole about 4 inches in diameter.

### **Step Two:**

Mix the packet of gelatin according to the instructions on the package.

### **Step Three:**

Stir the bird seed into the gelatin.

### **Step Four:**

Once cooled, the mixture should form a ball if you squeeze it in your hand. If it is too loose, add more bird seed.

### **Step Five:**

This is the messy part. Mold the mixture by hand onto the cardboard. It should stick to the cardboard. If it is not sticking enough, use wire to secure it into place.

### **Step Six:**

Attach the wire for hanging. Add any desire decorations. Then hang your new bird seed wreath in a location where you can enjoy watching the wild birds feast.

## **Bird Seed Ornaments**

One of my favourite holiday activities is decorating the garden with items that wild birds enjoy, such as these bread and birdseed ornaments. These ornaments are easy to create and a fun project to do with your children.

### **You will need:**

- Pre-sliced sandwich bread (extra-thin works best)
- Peanut Butter
- Bird Seed
- Twine or Raffia
- Cookie Cutters in simple Christmas shapes
- Ice Pick

**Directions:**

Simply place the bread on a flat surface and cut your shape with a cookie cutter. Depending on the size of your cookie cutter, you will probably be able to make one ornament per slice of bread.

Poke a hole through the top of the ornament with a sharp stick or ice pick. Take a piece of raffia or twine and string it through the hole you made at the top of the ornament. Tie a knot to create a loop.

Either toast the bread or allow it to dry overnight. The peanut butter acts as glue for the bird seed. Spread your bird seed mix out on a cookie sheet. Spread peanut butter on both sides of the bread. Then press the peanut butter covered ornament onto the bird seed mix on both sides. Allow them to dry overnight.

Now you are ready to hang your bird seed ornament out in the garden. I like to place these in locations where I can easily see them from indoors, but also close to shrubs and trees where birds will feel safe.

# **Bird Feeders**

You can feed birds by simply throwing bird food on the ground. But using a vessel to hold the bird food will attract more birds. Before buying or building a bird feeder you will have to decide the type of food you will be offering your feathered friends.

The most popular style of bird feeders are platform, hopper, tube, suet and hummingbird. Each style of feeder is designed to dispense certain types of bird food.

## **Platform Feeders**

The platform or tray feeder is one of the best bird feeders to use for homemade bird foods. It can be as simple as a plate or flat piece of wood. Platform feeders can be hung, pole mounted or placed on the ground. Many styles are covered with a roof to protect the birds while feeding and the seed from spoiling.

The most important feature to look for when purchasing a platform feeder is drainage. Without drainage water will collect around the seed causing it to spoil. The biggest advantage to using a platform feeder is its ability to dispense any time of bird food. The disadvantage is protecting the bird food from unwanted pests.

## **Hopper Feeder**

The hopper feeder is sometimes combined with the design of a platform feeder to increase seed storage while providing perching space for larger birds. This will attract many wild birds that are not comfortable feeding from tube feeders.

Hopper feeders are designed to hold most types of bird seed. Many hopper feeders hold a large amount of seed reducing the amount of time you spend filling it, other styles are designed to be squirrel proof.

## **Tube Feeders**

Tube feeders are the most popular style of bird feeders. One reason for that is their size. A single tube feeder can be used in a small area. And if you want more seed capacity, you simply use a longer feeder in the same area without taking up any more space. Some tube feeders are designed with a single tube used for dispensing one type of bird seed. Others have three tubes making it possible to dispense three different types of bird seed. This makes it possible to attract a wide variety of wild birds into a small area.

There are many variations in design including domed, caged, with trays, decorative, plastic, metal and even mechanically squirrel proof. Most tube feeders are designed to dispense mixed seeds or sunflower seeds. One specialized style of tube feeder is called a thistle feeder or finch feeder. They are specially designed for the tiny nyjer seed (thistle) and are popular for attracting the beautiful American Goldfinch.

## **Suet Feeders**

Suet feeders are designed to hold suet cakes. They come in two sizes; one made to hold a standard 5"x 1" square suet cake and the other is made to hold 7"x 2" square suet cake. These types of feeders are popular for attracting tree clinging birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches.

If you plan on making your own suet bird food then you may want to purchase several suet feeders. The basic cage style feeders are very economical.

## **Nectar Feeders**

Nectar feeders are designed to dispense liquid bird food usually for hummingbirds. There are two styles, bottle and dish. The bottle feeder is usually designed with the feeding port below the storage "bottle". The liquid is drawn down the tube by the feeding action of the hummingbird. The dish feeder usually has several feeding ports above the "dish".

Hummingbirds can feed while hovering or sitting on a perch if one is provided.

My personal preference is the dish style hummingbird feeder. Having several feeding ports, a dish feeder can accommodate several hummingbirds at the same time. Using a dish feeder with a built in a cup makes it easier to keep pesky ants away from the hummingbird solution.

### **Other Bird Feeders**

There are many other specialized bird feeders available including fruit feeders, suet plug feeders and oriole feeders, just to name a few. When building a bird feeding station it is best to use a variety of feeders and food. Doing so will attract a wide variety of wild birds and make backyard bird watching a more enjoyable experience.

[www.a-home-for-wild-birds.com](http://www.a-home-for-wild-birds.com)

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