

CARING FOR BIRDS AND ATTRACTING THEM TO OUR GARDENS IN WINTER



WATER: Provide drinking water in a bird bath or any dish and change it every day. Fill the bird bath with 2 inches of water and set a rock in the middle for perching. Clean the bird bath every couple of days with vinegar and water. If the bird bath freezes over, provide warm water in another dish and replace the bird bath ice with warmer water. Birds can stand on ice. They won't freeze, as they have little pads on the bottom of their feet.

FOOD: Provide food high in fat. The fat will be stored in the bird's body to insulate them from cold and provide the necessary

energy. Peanut butter is very good for this. Buy or make a suet block. This is made of lard and bird seed made into a block. The lard provides fat for the bird's insulation. It is essential to provide bird seed when natural bird food is scarce. Black oil sunflower seed is the most nutritious and is easily found in stores, although more expensive than the cheaper variety. Add some meal worms to the food and birds will love it. It is important to keep bird seeds dry in winter so they will not produce bacteria and fungus. Bird seeds can be hung in a tubular feeder easily accessible to birds but not to squirrels.

CHEMICALS: Keep all chemical sprays to a very minimum during the winter to keep birds safe and to provide more insects for food.

FLOWERS: Don't cut the dried and wilted flower pods from last summer flowers. The birds will still glean the seeds from them and have another food source. Provide plants and shrubs, such as holly, that produce berries for more bird food.

SHELTER: Evergreen trees, such as pine, juniper and fir provide great shelter. Plant trees and shrubs in a variety of sizes to provide shelter for birds of different sizes. Owls, hawks, eagles need tall trees. Cardinals, robins, mockingbirds need medium size trees and bushes. Sparrows and wrens need lower bushes.

Provide bird houses for bird winter protection. Do not take down summer birdhouses and add even more for winter. Each bird house should have a different size entry hole to accommodate different bird sizes. The small holes offer entry for small birds and keep out the larger ones. The birds spend long, cold, rainy nights in their houses and, sometimes, several birds huddle together inside a single house.

Plant tall grass to provide bird's shelter and a place to hide from predators. Switch grass is an Oklahoma Proven Plant and is an excellent shelter for birds and is attractive in the garden. It also produces seeds in winter to provide a bird food source.

Using a pile of branches or a canvas lean-to can provide a bird shelter from the wind. Pile anything to protect the birds and remove it in spring.

For more information on attracting birds to your backyard in winter, call the Master Gardener phone line at 918-746-3701 or refer to the Master Gardener fact sheet [HLA 6435](#).