

Get Started on Your Winter Bird Feeding Program

Nebraska is a terrific place to discover the joys of learning about birds. You can start a bird feeding program anytime and results will vary with the seasons. For winter feeding, it is a good idea to have your feeders up now. Chickadees, downy woodpeckers and other birds are looking for winter feeding areas. And, food will be available to birds migrating through the area.

Place feeders where they are protected by winds and predators. Choose locations where birds can avoid colliding with windows if they are startled and fly away from the feeders. Try putting your feeder in a somewhat open area but within about 10 feet of cover like bushes or trees. The birds will be able to see predators (like the neighborhood cat), and still use the shrubs and trees to avoid strong winds or hide from overhead predators like hawks.

There are many types of bird feeders. You can purchase them or make simple feeders at home using recycled materials. Use feeders that protect the seeds from rain and snow, are easy to fill and clean, and have a way to dispense the seed so you don't have as much spillage. Some seed that falls to the ground is okay because birds like juncos prefer to feed on the ground.

A variety of feeders and foods placed in various locations around your home help provide for the greatest diversity of birds and reduces competition at the feeders. Small hanging feeders attract chickadees, finches and nuthatches. Feeders placed low to the ground attract birds like juncos and native sparrows.



Solidly mounted, aboveground feeders attract a large variety of birds including cardinals, chickadees, grosbeaks, finches, woodpeckers and more.

When choosing seeds, think about the types of birds you want to attract. Small black oil-type sunflower seeds are the most widely preferred bird seeds. Safflower seeds are popular with enthusiasts who report that cardinals, chickadees, some larger finches, nuthatches and mourning doves eat safflower seed, but it is not eaten by less desirable birds like grackles and starlings so they may avoid the feeder.

Birds prefer good quality seeds that are reasonably fresh. For example: niger thistle seeds are popular in finch feeders. The seed is very attractive to finches when fresh, but they reject it if it is several months old.

Commercial mixes may be a convenient way to get started and are inexpensive. However, these mixes may not be fresh

and typically contain large amounts of filler seeds that the birds waste so they end up not being an economical choice. Instead, try mixing your own seeds or try fresh specialty mixes available from sources that specialize in bird feeding products. Here is a seed combination that is attractive to a wide range of desirable backyard

songbirds:

- 50% sunflower seeds
- 35% white proso millet
- 15% finely cracked corn

Other combinations of seeds also work well — adjust them to your own situation and to the types of birds you want to attract. You could also try different types of seeds in different locations throughout your yard to see what works best.

Important — Keep Your Feeders Clean! Clean your feeders and disinfect them occasionally. Use a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water. Rinse well with clean water and make sure the feeder is dry before refilling with fresh seeds.

Periodically sweep or rake spilled seeds and seed hulls from under the feeder.

Watch for future NEBLINE articles with tips and recipes to help you attract songbirds to your winter landscape.

Source: UNL NebGuide Backyard Wildlife: Feeding Birds (G83-669-A) by Ron Johnson, Extension Wildlife Specialist, available online at lancaster.unl.edu/enviro/pest/wildlife.htm. (SC)

Here are Some Common Backyard Birds and their Favorite Foods

American Goldfinch: Niger thistle seeds, broken sunflower hearts, oil-type sunflower seeds

Northern Cardinal: Sunflower seeds (all types), safflower, cracked corn, millet, unsalted nutmeats, raisins

Black-capped Chickadee: Oil-type sunflower seeds, cracked unsalted nutmeats, safflower, suet

Dark-eyed Junco: Red or white proso millet, finely cracked corn, oil-type sunflower seed, unsalted nutmeats

Native Sparrows: Red or white proso millet, oil-type sunflower seeds, cracked corn, some safflower

Woodpeckers: Suet, unsalted nutmeats, sunflower seeds, cracked corn

Hedge Apples: Not a Good Insect Repellent

How many hedge apples are needed to keep stored grain pests out of a grain bin? Someone actually called the extension office with this question a few years ago.

The belief about the use of hedge apples as an insect repellent is widespread and persistent. It is claimed that placing hedge apples around the foundation or inside the basement will repel or control insects.

The truth: Iowa State University toxicologists have chemically extracted compounds from hedge apples. When concentrated, these compounds repel insects. But, these researchers also found that the normal concentration of these compounds in the fruit was too low to be an effective repellent.

One homeowner reported she found the source of an Indian meal moth infestation in a bag of hedge apples she had in her basement to keep spiders away. So, we don't recommend hedge apples as an insect repellent for grain bins. (BPO)



What are Zoonoses?

According to Scott Hygnstrom and Dallas Virchow, UNL wildlife specialists, West Nile virus, Lyme disease, tularemia, rabies, hantavirus and monkeypox are similar in that they are all diseases that occur in both animals and people. Scientists refer to these diseases as "zoonoses." Of the 1,709 infectious organisms known to cause diseases in humans, nearly half are zoonotic.

Some diseases, such as rabies, are typically cyclic, with incidences being extremely low during some periods and high during others. For example, from 1992 to 2002, fewer than five skunks tested positive for rabies each year in Nebraska. However, rabies among skunks now is at a 20-year high with 57 skunks testing positive so far this year.

Other zoonotic diseases, such as West Nile virus, which is new to Nebraska, may result in more animal fatalities during the first several years after it shows up. Animals tend to develop resistance to the disease over time, so fewer fatalities may occur in subsequent years.

While certain factors, such as geography, occupation, age, health status and level of outdoor

activity, may predispose some people to come in contact with a zoonotic disease, most people are safe. Chances of exposure are low unless you are among the few people within high risk groups that work directly with animals.

Common modes of disease transmission include contact with animal body fluids, consumption of infected meat or indirect contact with contaminated air, water or soil. Infectious organisms of many zoonoses are carried from animals to people by bites of insects or ticks. Therefore, avoiding insect bites and insect-infested areas can reduce risk. People can also reduce their exposure to zoonoses by making sure pets are vaccinated, keeping pets away from wildlife and wearing plastic gloves when handling dead animals.

Fortunately, most zoonotic diseases are not life-threatening. However people should be aware of the diseases' early and late symptoms, seriousness and treatment. Despite deaths due to West Nile and hantavirus, symptoms produced by most zoonoses in people are either mild or effectively treated when diagnosed early.

People sometimes panic unnecessarily about these zoonotic diseases because they are reported so frequently in the news. Statistics show that the risk of infection from life-threatening zoonoses is very low compared to other diseases. Hantavirus cases in the United States average about 10 per year. Monkeypox, though new, has 71 cases to date.

Chicken pox, a common childhood disease, is highly contagious among humans, but most people don't think much about consequences of this disease. However, before an effective vaccine was developed in 1995, about 100 deaths and 4,000 to 9,000 hospitalizations from chickenpox occurred each year in the United States. By comparison, monkeypox has a low rate of infection via person-to-person contact and should not cause people to panic.

The number of deaths attributable to zoonoses are lower than those caused by other common diseases. More than 200 Omahans died during the first half of 2003 from influenza or pneumonia. By contrast, rabies deaths across the entire U.S. average less than one each year. (BPO)

Last Household Hazardous Waste Collection!

Cleaning your garage and don't know what to do with those unwanted pesticides and solvents? If you live in Lancaster County, you are in luck. Bring them to the last Household Hazardous Waste collection:

Saturday, November 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
State Fair Park, 4-H Youth Complex

Items you can bring for disposal:

- **Heavy metals:** items containing mercury such as thermometers and thermostats.
- **Solvents:** mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, oil-based paints, varnishes, stains, polishes and waxes.
- **Pesticides:** weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powder, rat poisons. You may also bring EPA banned products, like DDT, chlordane, 2,4,5-T, pentachlorophenol, silvex, PCP and Dursban.
- **PCB's:** Ballasts from old fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances including radios, motors and televisions.

Leave products in their original container and keep the label intact. Open, leaking or rusted containers should be placed in a clear plastic bag during transport. Do not mix chemicals.

Do not bring medicines, explosives or ammunition, fertilizers, used oil, general household trash, antifreeze or batteries. For more specific information, call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040. (BPO)