

Feeding wild birds



Feeding wild birds is a popular and worthwhile activity, with large numbers of people in this country providing bird food in their gardens. Giving birds extra food will bring them closer so that you can identify them and observe their fascinating behaviour. Attracting birds is also an ideal way to introduce children to wildlife. Where you place food for the birds depends on your garden and whether or not cats and other predators have access.

Birds may be enticed into your garden by providing suitable food in bird feeders, on traditional bird tables or simply placed on the ground. Different food attracts different birds so, in this area, mixed seeds in feeders will attract house sparrows, greenfinches, blue tits, great tits and long tailed tits whereas nyjer seeds are favourites with goldfinches and siskins. Peanuts are rich in fat and popular with many birds, especially tits, greenfinches and house sparrows. Ground feeders such as robins, dunnocks, wrens, collared doves and pigeons will visit your garden for crushed nuts and seeds, whereas blackbirds and thrushes favour currents and sultanas.

Fat balls and bird cake are excellent summer and winter food. You can make your own by pouring melted suet or lard into a mixture of seeds, nuts, dried fruit and crushed biscuits. Use about one-third fat to two-thirds mixture. Stir well in a bowl and allow to set in a shallow container such as an empty half coconut shell, or cut into pieces when set and place in a bag made from plastic netting used for packaging fruit. Hang these high enough for the birds to feel safe but low enough for you to be able to see them. Alternatively, you can place small pieces on a bird table or on the ground.

Mealworms, either fresh or dried, are relished by blackbirds, thrushes and robins and may attract other insect-eating birds such as pied wagtails. Meaty pet food is a good substitute for earthworms during dry summer months when worms are difficult to find.

A few "don'ts" - don't feed mouldy food as some moulds can cause respiratory infections in birds; never offer them milk as birds cannot digest it (although cheese is a dairy product it is fine and will attract robins, blackbirds, wrens and dunnocks); avoid fat in which meat has been cooked, desiccated coconut, salted and dry roasted peanuts.

One final "do" - remember to provide birds with clean water to drink throughout the year. This is especially important in dry periods when water is hard to find.