

On the Postive Side: Wild Bird Winter Tips
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As advocates of humane treatment for animals many people provide for wild birds and winter is an especially hard time for some species. The drier conditions this year has made conditions even more difficult. The following information and tips are provided by guest author, Kristi Lane with Wild birds Unlimited.

In addition to being humane assistance, attracting and feeding wild birds is a relaxing and rewarding hobby enjoyed by millions of people. We have many interesting and pretty birds in the southwest. There are four basic things to keep in mind that all birds need; food, water, shelter and a place to raise their young. Providing water is the easiest way to attract birds to your yard and always critical in our desert environs. Birds need water to drink and to bathe. A clean bird is a warm bird, that's why you see birds bathing in cold weather. Try adding a thermostat-controlled heater to your bird bath to keep water from freezing so that it's always available for the birds.

A few tricks or tips to attracting and helping a variety of birds this winter season are:

Make sure you offer a good quality seed blend. It should contain at least 50% black oil sunflower seed, which is many birds favorite bird food. A lot of discount seed blends contain up to 75% cereal grain fillers, such as milo, wheat and oats, most birds don't like to eat. The filler gets tossed to the ground to be eaten by doves and pigeons or left to grow.

Offer a broad selection of foods to attract the greatest variety of birds. Especially this time of year, birds require high fat, quick energy food to stay active and warm in colder weather. For example high fat foods such as, peanuts, black oil sunflower seed and no-melt dough are favorites of Pyrrhuloxia (Desert Cardinals) and house finches.

No-melt dough is a form of suet that won't melt up to 130 deg. In our area, use no-melt dough instead of suet. It will keep better in all kinds of weather. Since birds identify food by sight, when first offering no-melt dough, use Bark Butter® or peanut butter as the glue to stick seeds to the side of the cake so that birds will more easily recognize it as food.

Juncos, White-crowned Sparrows and Towhees are ground-feeding birds that enjoy millet. Sprinkle millet under or around bushes for these pretty little birds or offer it in a tray with a guard (to keep out larger birds such as doves and pigeons). Place the tray near shrubs or another kind of "windbreak" to provide your ground-feeding birds a safe place to hide, digest their food and escape from windy, cold conditions. If you have cats in your yard, you will need to place the feeder away from shrubs or places where a cat can hide.

Nyjer (or thistle) is the goldfinch's favorite food. Place finch feeders away from feeders where larger birds are feeding. This allows the smaller finches to access the feeder without feeling intimidated by larger birds.

Following these simple tips, you can provide a more positive winter outcome for wild birds that brighten our landscapes and our lives.

Wild Birds Unlimited, located at 2001 E Lohman, #130, Las Cruces, NM specializes in bringing people and nature together with their birdfeeding and nature products, their expert advice and educational events. Visit their web site at www.wbu.com/lascruces. Interested guest authors can contact the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico at 523-8020.