

Summer bird feeding tips

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/birdfeeding/summer.html>



Many people are discovering that feeding birds in summer can provide an abundance of surprising and interesting visitors. **Bluebirds, thrashers, catbirds, orioles, grosbeaks, eastern towhees, woodpeckers, and hummingbirds** can all be attracted during the summer months.

You can double the number of bird species visiting your feeders by offering a diversity of food and feeders during the summer.

Foods

Fruits and jelly

American robins, gray catbirds, blue jays, and northern cardinals are readily attracted to apple halves. Place the halves on nails that are driven into a perch, such as a tree stump or the top of a log, near the ground.

While it is generally well known that **northern orioles** feed on orange halves, it is less well known that **red-bellied** and **red-headed woodpeckers** are also attracted to them.

As with apple halves, simply push the orange halves onto nails that are partially driven into convenient logs, stumps, or the roofs of feeders.

Gray catbirds and **American robins** will also eat grape jelly.

Generic brands are the least inexpensive to use and work well in attracting birds to your feeders.

Provide the jelly in shallow trays about three or four inches in diameter and about one inch in depth.

In the spring, place an orange half near the feeder, as the orange color helps attract the attention of the **orioles**.

First, try placing several overripe bananas in a mesh bag and hang it near your hummingbird feeder. The fruit will soon attract a colony of fruit flies.

The hummingbirds will drink the sugar water and alternately visit the "banana bag" to capture the fruit flies, which provide a good source of protein.

A second use of bananas is to place some on a feeder tray in the spring and early summer, especially during the warbler migration. Peel one side or split the banana lengthwise to expose the fruit.

Tennessee warbler, summer tanagers, and northern orioles are all potential visitors for a banana lunch.

Mealworms

Birds that don't normally visit feeders, such as **bluebirds, robins, wrens**, and some **warblers**, are attracted to mealworms. Regular feeder birds, including **gray catbirds, chipping sparrows, northern cardinals, indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks**, and **Baltimore orioles**, are also easily attracted to the tasty mealworms.

Mealworms may be offered in old breakfast food bowls or shallow plastic food dishes that are too slick on the sides for the mealworms to climb. Place the bowls or dishes in an open area where the movement of the mealworms will attract the birds' attention.

Try placing a mixture of mealworms, peanuts, and sunflower seeds on a small, bare patch of soil, about twelve inches in diameter, near a hedge. Placing it on the ground may attract **brown thrashers** to your feeder. Mealworms can be purchased at pet stores or bait shops.

Peanuts and millet

Peanuts and a commercial mix of nuts called "peanut pickouts" are extremely successful for attracting a variety of birds, such as **chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers**, and **blue jays**.

Peanuts can be fed year-round and are a good alternative to beef suet in the summer.

They can be offered in cylindrical feeders assembled from quarter-inch mesh hardware cloth, which deters pilfering efforts by squirrels.

To discourage **house sparrows** and **brown-headed cowbirds** in the summer, decrease the amount of white proso millet used in feeders.

If you live in an area of mature hardwood forest in the eastern half of the United States, however, it is worth at least one cylindrical feeder stocked with white proso millet to attract **indigo buntings** and **chipping sparrows**.

Seeds and mixes

Niger seed ("thistle") is popular for its ability to attract American goldfinches, but finch mixes are also excellent for attracting **goldfinches, pine siskins** and **house finches**.

Finch mix contains a combination of niger, fine sunflower chips and peanut hearts. This is an excellent food for **finch** species and is cheaper than niger seed.

The tiny slits of a niger feeder, however, are too small for finch mix. Use a commercial cylindrical sunflower seed feeder with larger feeder ports when using finch mix.

Finch mixes contain fine sunflower chips, peanut hearts and niger.

If **house finches** overwhelm other birds at finch feeders, the perches need to be placed above the feeder ports to deter the less acrobatic **house finches**.

Black-oil sunflower seeds should comprise the bulk of the summer feeding ingredients for seed-eating birds, such as **rose-breasted grosbeaks, northern cardinals, purple finches, chickadees, blue jays** and **mourning doves**.

Many birds seem to prefer black-oil sunflower seeds over the striped variety because it is easier for smaller songbirds to crack the shells open.

Sunflower seeds can be mixed with safflower seeds and peanuts to create very appealing "cardinal mixes." Safflower seeds can also provide a good alternative summer food that is less attractive to **house sparrows, European starlings** and squirrels.

Sunflower seeds can also be scattered on the ground for birds like **mourning doves, eastern towhees, and northern cardinals**.

Sugar water

Attracts: Hummingbirds, northern orioles, nuthatches, woodpeckers

Attracting hummingbirds with a sugar water solution is a popular summer hobby.

The solution is prepared at a ratio of four parts water to one part cane sugar. Boil the solution, then let it cool before filling your feeder.

Unused sugar water can be stored in the refrigerator until needed. Adding red food coloring is unnecessary because the red plastic feeder ports will attract hummingbirds.

Commercial oriole feeders are available, but orioles and other birds can also be attracted to chick waterers filled with sugar water solutions.



Change the sugar water solution regularly to prevent the formation of a black fungus that can degrade the solution.

Feeder arrangement and water

The most successful bird-feeding stations in Minnesota have at least twelve to fifteen feeders arranged in three or four clusters.



Feeders should be in the open, at least ten feet from shrubs or other cover where cats could hide. If you place a feeder next to a tree or shrub, encircle it with 2" x 4" welded wire garden fencing at least 30" high.

This prevents cats from leaping into the feeders and catching birds. It also deters the approach of raptors that may occasionally visit feeder sites.

Water is also a necessary ingredient for a successful summer feeding program. Water is especially attractive to birds if it drips, splashes, or mists.

Water baths should be maintained at a depth of an inch or less and cleaned regularly. They should be placed in open area and far enough from feeders to prevent seeds from falling in.

For more specialty baths contact your local wild bird specialty store, hardware store or garden center.