

Feeding Garden Birds

How to attract birds to the garden



Over the past 50 years, many 'common' birds have dramatically declined. No-one knows for sure the reasons for this, but changing agricultural practices and a lack of food in the summer and winter have taken their toll.

Sometimes when we look out of the window into our gardens, it is difficult to believe that song thrushes, sparrows and starlings are all struggling to survive in the countryside, but they are. These among many others are now red listed as species of extreme concern.

Feeding birds in summer and winter can really help. By putting out a range of food in different locations, you could attract up to 50 species of bird to the garden. Not forgetting that birds also need a regular supply of clean water. This fact sheet shows you how.

Summer Feeding

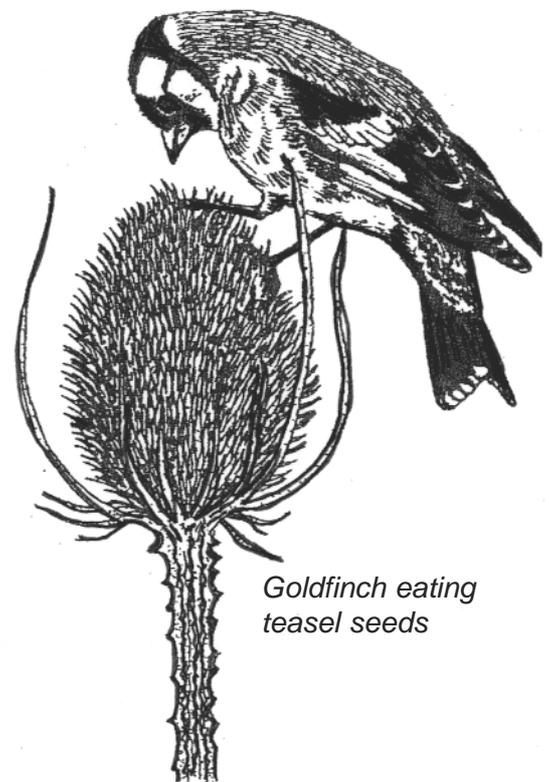
Summer feeding is important to the successful rearing of young, but do not put out whole peanuts that can choke chicks. Also avoid using pesticides and slug pellets that kill natural prey and can also poison birds.

Food to provide

Any kitchen scraps will be welcome, but do not put out desiccated coconut, which swells in the stomach, and moisten very dry bread.

Cheese	*Unsalted peanuts	Suet
Baked potato	Chopped bacon rind	Sunflower seeds
Porridge oats	Pieces of apple	Sultanas
Raisins	Coconut halves	Uncooked pastry
Stale cake	Mealworms	Moistened bread
Currants	Nuts	

* see over - note on "What to Buy"



Goldfinch eating teasel seeds

Water, Water Everywhere

Gardens can be made more attractive to birds by the addition of water. If you do not have a bird bath, use an upside down plastic bin lid or large plant pot saucer. Keep it topped up, free of ice and clean to stop the spread of diseases like salmonella.



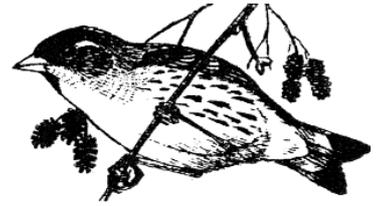
Where to put food

To maximise the number and diversity of birds visiting the garden, put out a variety of foods on the ground, in feeders, on bird tables and smeared in the cracks of trees. To avoid rats, only put small quantities of food on the ground in the morning and remove old/rotten food daily.

"See our basically boxes factsheet on making and buying bird boxes."

Natural Foods

To complement supplementary feeds, many plants provide natural foods like berries, fruit and seeds. Some birds also feast on insects, caterpillars and snails. A log pile in a shady spot and a compost bin will provide good hunting grounds for insects.



Plants with berries and hips

Hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose, field rose, guelder rose, yew, holly, juniper, rowan, cotoneaster, bird cherry, ivy, spindle, mahonia, crab apple, wild cherry, honeysuckle, pyracantha, raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, apple, plum, cherry and pear trees, black currants, red currants, mulberry and blackberries.

Plants with seeds

teasel, honesty, globe thistles, charlock, sunflowers, old man's beard, scabious, forget-me-not, cosmos, goosefoot, knotgrass, michaelmas daisies, spindle and grasses.

Trees supporting lots of insects oak, birch, hazel, poplar, willow, rowan, and alder.



Bullfinches like to eat cherry blossom

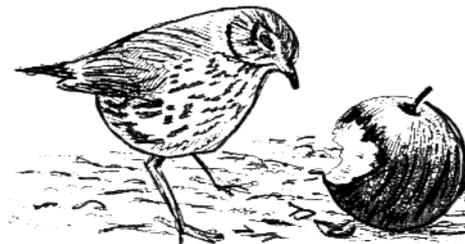
Fat cakes

Fat cakes are enjoyed by a variety of birds and are easy to make.

- 1) Melt some fat (lard, suet or the fat off the Sunday roast) and pour into a tub or half coconut shell.
- 2) Mix in any of the ingredients mentioned overleaf and allow to set.
- 3) Hang off a bird table or tree.

Cats

Do not hang feeders where cats can easily get birds. Hang in prickly bushes or on very thin twigs away from fences.



Lawns

Grass lawns provide good hunting grounds for blackbirds and song thrushes looking for worms. Mistle thrushes will visit large lawns and occasionally, green woodpeckers will visit the garden looking for ants.

"What to buy"

If choosing a seed mix, look for one with a good variety of seeds and one with a high content of black sunflower seeds. These are particularly high in nutrients. Nuts should be unsalted and bear the British Trust for Ornithology's 'safe' kite mark. This will ensure nuts have not been sprayed with chemicals that can kill birds.

Suppliers

Most garden centres, large DIY stores and pet shops sell a variety of bird foods and feeders.



*Remember
to leave some
fallen fruit for birds*

