

# *Backyard Birding Guides*

## **#1 - Feeding the Birds**

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A good way to bring birds up close to your home is to feed them. The type of birds you attract will depend on the type of feed you put out, the type of feeder you use and the location of the feeder and feed.

There are several different types of feeders. The most common are platform feeders, tube feeders, suet feeders and hanging feeders. There also are variations and combinations. Choose a ground level platform feeder or a raised platform feeder. Choose a high or low hanging feeder. Location, high or low, as well as surrounding cover seems to have as much to do with usage of the feeder by birds as does the type of feeder.

Water is another important consideration in backyard habitats. In the winter, sources of open water may be scarce. A birdbath, with a birdbath heater, may attract as many birds as the feed in your feeders. Locate the birdbath where it will be convenient to fill and close enough to an electrical outlet to provide current to a heater.

The following tables list the more common feeds and feeder locations for the birds we are likely to attract in Kansas. Preferred food also is identified. Some species are generally year round Kansas residents (designated with a P following their name) and some are primarily winter residents (W). Not all of these birds are going to be in Kansas every year. You also can expect to see species other than those listed, especially during spring and fall migration. Feeds are listed in order of preference.

**American Goldfinch** (P) - Raised or hanging feeders - black oil sunflower, Niger thistle, hulled sunflower.

**American Tree Sparrow & Harris Sparrow** (W) - Ground feeders or low raised feeders - white proso millet and golden (German) millet, Niger thistle, hulled sunflower, fine cracked corn.

**Black-capped Chickadee** (P) - Ground feeder, low raised or hanging feeder - black oil sunflower, black striped sunflower, peanut kernels, safflower, suet.

**Blue Jay** (P) - Raised feeder (high or low) - peanut kernels, black striped sunflower, suet.

**Common Grackle** (P) - Ground feeder or low raised feeder - sunflower of any kind, peanut kernels, peanut hearts, fine cracked corn.

**Dark-eyed Junco** (W) - Ground feeder or low raised feeder - white proso millet, golden millet, hulled sunflower, Niger thistle, cracked corn.

**Downy, Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker** (P) - Hanging feeder - suet, sunflower.

**Evening Grosbeak** (W) - High hanging feeder - black oil sunflower, black striped sunflower, hulled sunflower.

**House Finch** (P) - Low raised feeder or hanging feeder - Niger thistle, sunflower of any kind, peanut kernels and peanut hearts, white proso millet, safflower.

**House Sparrow** (P) - Ground feeder or low raised feeder - white proso millet and golden millet, sunflower of any kind, peanut hearts, red proso millet, fine cracked corn.

**Mourning Dove** (P) - Ground feeder - black oil sunflower, white proso millet, red proso millet, golden millet, Niger thistle, other sunflower, peanut hearts, fine cracked corn, safflower.

**Northern Cardinal** (P) - Low raised feeder - black oil sunflower, black striped sunflower, hulled sunflower, peanut kernels, peanut hearts, white proso millet, safflower.

**Pine Siskin (W)** - Raised feeders - Niger thistle, hulled sunflower, white proso millet, golden millet.

**Purple Finch (W)** - High raised feeder or hanging feeder - black oil sunflower, black striped sunflower, Niger thistle, hulled sunflower.

**White (P) or Red Breasted Nuthatches (W)** - Ground feeders, low raised feeders, suet feeders - suet, black oil sunflower, black striped sunflower, hulled sunflower.

**Red-winged Blackbird (P)** - Ground feeder, low raised feeder - hulled sunflower, white proso millet, golden millet, fine cracked corn.

**Starling (P)** - Ground feeder, low raised feeder, hanging feeder - suet, hulled sunflower, fine cracked corn.

**Tufted Titmouse (P)** - Low raised feeder, hanging feeder - peanut kernels, black oil sunflower, black striped sunflower, hulled sunflower.

## **Bird Feed**

The following are generalized results of US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) studies on food preferences of birds feeding at feeder stations. Remember that there is no harm in keeping feed out year round as long as you regularly disinfect feeders with a strong bleach solution (four ounces bleach per gallon of water).

### **Sunflower seed**

- a) black oil - superior to other foods for most species
- b) black-striped - most all will use but only titmice and blue jays prefer
- c) gray-striped - species use this less than the other two.

**White Proso Millet** - preferred food of juncos, mourning doves, and all sparrows, an excellent food source.

**Red Proso Millet** - can be used as a substitute for white proso but not as preferred.

**Golden (German) Millet** - was used but was the least preferred of the millets.

**Milo (sorghum)** - was generally unattractive to all species.

**Cracked corn** - eaten about one third as often as white proso millet.

**Safflower seed** - not included in USFWS studies but generally considered acceptable (somewhat less preferred than sunflower) to some species. (Squirrels don't seem to care for it.)

**Canary seed** - less attractive than white proso millet but usually costs 70% more.

**Rape seed** (canola seed) - least attractive feed in the study.

**Wheat** - was used by same species that ate black striped sunflower or white proso millet but to a much lesser extent.

**Flax seed** - almost completely ignored.

**Oats** - only Starlings found hulled oats highly attractive.

**Peanut hearts** - extremely attractive to starlings.  
**Peanut kernels** - quite attractive to numerous species.

**Niger Thistle Seed** - Not related to Kansas thistles. Much less attractive than native thistles but still highly utilized by finches and relatives. All of the species that utilize thistle seed will also find black oil sunflower highly attractive.

**Suet** - Suet is an animal fat (usually beef). It is a high-energy food source preferred by many bird species, including woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches and creepers. It can be fed raw or rendered, plain or mixed with other feeds. It is normally fed in the winter, but many preparations will work well for summer feeding. You can purchase commercially prepared suet cakes, or buy raw suet and make your own. For more information on suet, see Backyard Bird Guide #2 *Suet and Other Winter Bird Feeding Recipes*.

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