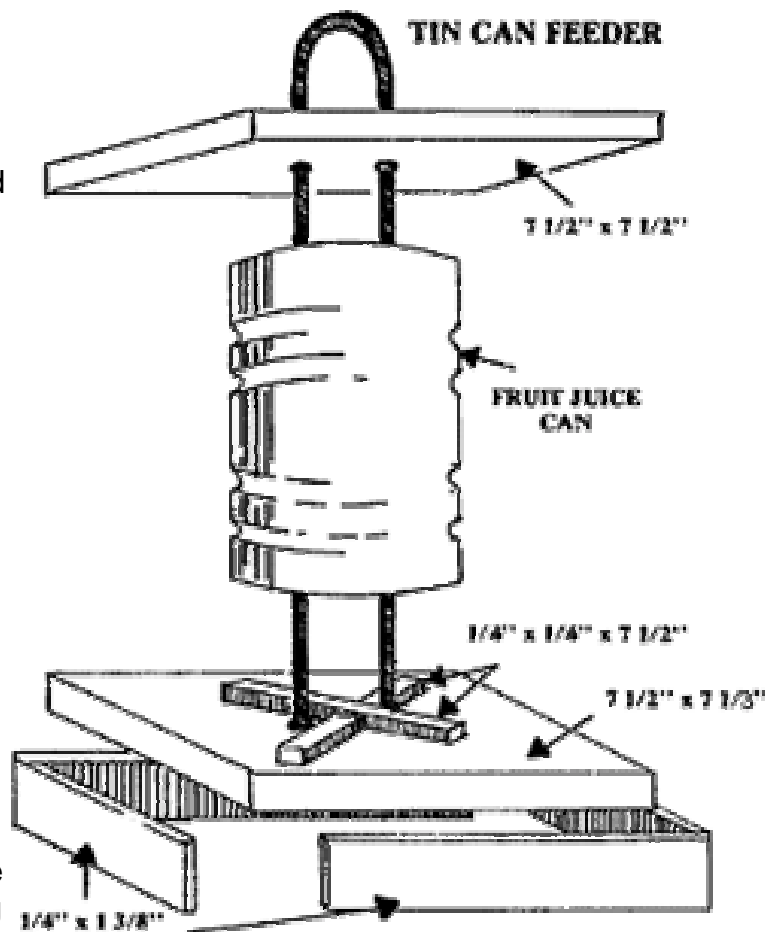


Each year, more and more Americans are discovering the joys of learning about birds. Attracting songbirds to your backyard is a popular and convenient way to observe them up close. To attract birds year-round, provide their three basic needs of food, water, and cover, collectively called habitat. Cover includes shelter from harsh weather and enemies, plus a place for reproduction or nest building. Bird-feeding, bird houses, a source of water, and various plant materials can provide habitat needs for your backyard birds.

Feeding Tips

Feeding is the simplest way to bring a variety of birds within easy viewing range. When feeding birds, remember that some are seed-eaters, others eat fruit, some eat insects, still others eat animals, and hummingbirds feed on flower nectar. The right kinds of seeds will attract many seed-eaters. Suet (hard beef fat) is relished by many insect-feeders such as woodpeckers, and a sugar water solution attracts hummingbirds.

Generally, you should feed birds during the colder months of the year when their natural foods are less available. Some birds will come to feeders throughout the summer, but the availability of natural foods usually reduces their numbers. During late spring and summer, many backyard birds eat insects and feed insects to their young. This can be beneficial to the garden and lawn. If you feed during warm weather, be sure the feed does not become moldy or spoiled.



Hopper-type seed feeders of various designs are the most common and versatile. Some of these limit feeding to certain birds. One type is surrounded by dowels or wire spaced so that only small birds can enter. Another type has a counter-balanced perch that allows only lightweight birds to feed; larger, heavier birds trip the perch which closes the feeder door. Other specialty feeders include finch feeders that dispense very tiny seeds such as thistle or niger seeds, hummingbird feeders for sugar water mixtures, and suet feeders.

For best results in feeding birds, consider the following tips:

1. Place the feeder where cats cannot hide and harm the birds when they come to feed. Try to situate it so that feeding birds are protected from strong winter winds. A good spot is a somewhat open area with bushes or trees nearby for shelter and escape cover.
2. Begin feeding early-about October or November-and continue without interruption until spring. Birds develop feeding patterns and become dependent on feeders for their food. Interruptions in the food supply will cause them to abandon feeders.
3. Use a variety of feeders. Aggressive or "bully" birds may prevent other birds from feeding if only one feeder is used. And, as birds have preferences in where they feed, a variety of feeders will attract more kinds. Small feeders without perches are good places for small grasping birds to feed. Feeders placed low to the ground will attract ground-feeding birds such as juncos and native sparrows. Larger above-ground feeders will draw in cardinals, grosbeaks, mourning doves and other larger birds.