



Feed the birds – their lives may depend upon you

We are now coming up to the main bird-feeding season, and as temperatures fall, it is vital that we continue to feed the birds. A bird can use 10% of its body weight to keep warm on a cold winter night, so if they arrive at your garden expecting to find food and there is none, they may have no other source. It can literally be the difference between life and death.

There are two distinct species of birds that come to feed; the first are the original woodland species including the blackbird, robin, song thrush, blue and great tits and chaffinch. The second are open country or farmland birds such as the starling, goldfinch and house sparrow and in the winter siskin, brambling and redpoll.



The birds feeding habits in the garden are directly related to the way they feed 'in the wild'. Tits and smaller finches are used to balancing on thin twigs and seed heads, so they will hang from parts of feeders. Larger birds need to have a stable perch to feed on, so feeders with metal rods are more suitable.

Blackbirds and song thrush, and in winter redwing and fieldfare. are ground feeders, so they are most at home on the flat surface of a bird table or a feeding tray near the ground. Make sure you leave some food at ground level for timid birds such as dunnocks and wrens, which wait to feed on food dropped from the table above.



The nuthatch, robin, blackbird and all of the tit family thrive on fat based products, unlike goldfinches, siskin, redpoll and brambling, which are specialist seed eaters and need a diet of mixed birdseed, millet, whole and hulled sunflower and nyjer seeds. They will also eat fat products as long as seeds are added to the mix. We grow all of these seeds on our farm, apart from the nyjer seed, which is grown in warmer climates.

When you feed birds in your garden there are a few simple rules to ensure their safety.

1. Site your bird feeding stations in the open so cats can't creep up, but also reasonably close to cover so birds can escape if Sparrowhawks come looking for their dinner.
2. Plenty of clean water for drinking and bathing is vital, particularly when there is a hard frost and natural sources of water may be frozen
3. Regularly wash all bird feeding equipment and feeding stations with disinfectant and remove spoilt food otherwise you will attract vermin.
4. Peanuts should be free of aflatoxin and placed in feeders that prevent the whole nut being removed; if chicks are fed whole peanuts in the nest they could choke. We are developing a suet pellet that is a peanut alternative, but without the aflatoxin risk.

On the farm we are well into the seed harvesting period and over the next month we will harvest sunflower seeds, red and white millet, linseed and maize.

For further information on our products please email James Parrish at info@parrishsfarm.co.uk or go to www.parrishsfarm.co.uk.

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