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## *If You Feed Them ...*

You don't have to go far from home to observe wild animals. Just set up a birdfeeder!

There is much talk these days about eliminating bird feeders in order to discourage bears from visiting your neighborhood. This is excellent advice and essential to follow from April 1 through the end of November, as recommended by Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. But from December through March, when black bears are snug in their dens sated on the fruits of summer, opportunity abounds to observe the feeding and social habits of our feathered friends. A little information about birds' habits and preferences will help you decide which menu items and serving dishes to offer up!

*Black-oil sunflower seeds* are the best choice if you are looking for an all-around crowd pleaser. High in fat, with a thin shell that is easy to handle and crack, they will be devoured by just about anyone. *Safflower seeds* are enjoyed by chickadees, titmice, and, even, downy woodpeckers. Best of all, they are disliked by squirrels! *Nyjer seeds* are the quintessential food of goldfinches; enjoyed also by house and purple finches along with pine siskins and redpolls. *Suet*, solid fat rendered from beef and venison, is favored by woodpeckers and enjoyed by any insect eating-birds, including wrens and titmice. To invite the ground foragers, juncos, sparrows, mourning doves and cardinals, scatter *cracked corn* and *white millet* on the ground.

Now that you have chosen your menu items, it is time to decide on what kind of feeder will best suit the needs of your feathered friends. *Hoppers* hold a large amount of seed and are easy to fill and clean. They can accommodate any size seed and invite birds both large and small, from doves and cardinals to sparrows and finches. *Tube feeders* come in a variety of sizes and designs, but all have small perches to encourage small woodland birds: chickadees, titmice, nuthatches and finches. The small perches tend to discourage our larger resident birds: cardinals, jays, doves and blackbirds. If you are inclined toward the *Nyjer seeds* in order to keep the company of finches in particular, you will want to shop for one of the specially designed tube feeders with small holes. *Platform feeders* are shallow boxes that can be hung from a branch, placed on the ground or mounted on a pole. They allow for many birds to congregate, and accommodate the larger birds who are unable to balance on the perches of the tube feeders. If you choose to put out *suet*, make sure to hang it high and clear of branches in an attempt to keep mammals at bay.

Homemade feeders are great fun to make. You can take advantage of this year's abundance of white pine cones to make decorative feeders. Tie a string to the top of each cone, gob it with peanut butter and roll it in seeds. Simply hang it on a branch and enjoy counting the many different types of birds who will come to admire and enjoy this delicious protein-rich treat! If you are inspired to make something more elaborate, try your hand at homemade bird cakes. Add one part peanut butter to one part melted beef fat or suet, and stir in three to six parts cornmeal. Cracked corn or millet can be added. The mixture can be poured into a small milk carton. When it cools cut holes in the side of the carton, add a perch, and hang the feeder up. The

mixture can also be poured into muffin tins and made into cakes, then crumbled and set out or put into a mini cage that keeps squirrels out.

One caution: Don't buy bags of mixed birdseed. They contain a lot of filler, so are no bargain. Buy the seeds you know your birds want. Also, when starting up a feeding program, be patient. It may take as long as several weeks before the birds discover your feeders. While you wait, be sure to keep the feeders filled. Remember, If you feed them ... they will come!

*If you would enjoy connecting with other birdfeeders check out Project Feederwatch, sponsored by Cornell University – [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/)*