

## Bird Feeding in Winter

Birds are an important part of our ecosystem and often struggle in Kansas winters where so much of their food is unavailable. Providing shelter, water and food for birds can help to preserve their populations and bring joy to winter landscapes.

In stores, many types of bird food mixes are available due to the differences in species. One type is widely popular among most of our local birds—black oil sunflower. A high percentage of this seed in your feeder will attract an array of birds! The second most popular feed is white proso millet which is a particular favorite of dark-eyed juncos, sparrows, and the red-winged blackbird.

More experienced bird feeders may choose to branch out and put multiple feeders out with the intent of attracting different birds. The following are the types of grains these species enjoy.

- Cardinal, evening grosbeak and most finch species: sunflower seeds, all types.
- Rufous-sided towhee: white proso millet.
- Dark-eyed junco: white and red proso millet, canary seed, fine cracked corn.
- Many sparrow species: white and red proso millet.
- Bluejay: peanut kernels and sunflower seeds of all types.
- Chickadee and tufted titmouse: peanut kernels, oil (black) and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Red-breasted nuthatch: oil (black) and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Brown thrasher: hulled and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Red-winged blackbird: white and red proso millet plus German (golden) millet
- Mourning dove: oil (black) sunflower seeds, white and red proso plus German (golden)millet.

My colleague at the Geary County Extension Office, Chuck Otte, has a wonderful publication on winter bird feeding recipes that can be found free online: <http://gearycountyextension.com/Birds/bbg2.pdf>

Along with store-bought food, birds can benefit from our winter landscapes. Leaving seed heads and some leaves in your flower beds allow birds to feed on seeds and insects that may burrow beneath the leaves. These same plants may also serve as winter protection for birds along with evergreen trees and shrubs and bird houses. Remember to keep these shelter plants far enough away from feeders that cats cannot stalk them as the birds eat. It is estimated that cats kill 2.4 billion birds every year in the United States alone, posing a serious threat to bird populations. If you do want to attract birds to your landscape, also pay careful attention to all chemical use, even organic products can harm wildlife.

In addition to food, fresh water is also critical for bird health. In the wintertime, a heated birdbath will bring birds to your yard when other water sources are scarce. Selecting a heated birdbath with a built-in thermostat is recommended.

Additional information about birds, including the webinar on of our Extension Master Gardeners taught this summer on landscaping for birds can be found on our website: <https://www.shawnee.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/pollinators-and-beneficial-insects.html>