

Feeding birds in winter

When it's icy cold and the weather is generally unsettled during winter, our native birds could really do with a helping hand, as long as the feeding we give them is both measured and correct. Experts from the specialist retail chain, Maxi Zoo answer your most important questions on feeding birds in Winter.

WHEN TO FEED?

Birds only need outside help when they can't find any food resources for themselves. This can be during times of lengthy snow cover, ice, freezing rain and persistent frost. During these weather spells, you should feed them very early in the morning and late after-noon. You should gradually discontinue feeding by the beginning of March at the latest, when insects are flying again and fields and gardens are frost-free. If you continue to provide food when the birds have already started nesting, they will prefer your more readily available food, which will result in the chicks being deprived of animal protein for their development - with fatal consequences.

WHAT TO GIVE THEM?

Our birds can be divided into two categories - soft beaked and insect eaters or grain eaters. Special food for both is available from pet shops. Soft beaked and insect eaters include blackbirds, thrushes, robins, wrens and gold crowned kinglets - they can't crack open hard

PET POINTERS



with Tony Cross

seed shells. For this reason, they like dry berries, rolled oats, raisins, fruit and bran. The grain eaters, which include finches, bullfinches, larks and sparrows, prefer seeds with hard shells, such as sunflower seeds, hemp and meadow food mixes. The popular fat balls, for hanging up, are suitable for great tits, which are soft beaked birds. Don't feed them any meal leftovers or other salty food or bread. This swells the bird's stomach. Snow and rain provide sufficient drinking water for these creatures.

HOW TO FEED?

A little birdhouse is the classic feeding place. This should be freestanding and not hemmed in by shrubbery so that cats can't sneak up on it unnoticed. Sufficient distance should also be kept from windowpanes. The feeding place should not be painted red as this colour triggers alarm in birds. You should clean out the bird box with hot water every day to prevent viruses and bacteria in droppings from contaminating the food. For this reason, little silos make good food dispensers because the food doesn't get soiled so easily.

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THE NATURAL GARDEN

The best form of help you can provide for the winter is to have a garden, which still offers a source of food in the late winter months. The fruits and seeds of certain shrubs and bushes, such as cranberry, spindle, dog rose and elder as well as mountain ash (rowan berry) and ivy provide a good, basic food source for many types of birds, small mammals and insects. It is best to leave remaining flowers and seed heads alone in the autumn and not cut bushes back too radically. Also, small creatures which robins or blackbirds feed on very often rummage around under the leaves. You should try not to use chemical aids in your garden so that the natural food sources are sustained.



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