

# FEEDING BIRDS

*What food can you leave out for birds and how can you keep your feeding station hygienic and pest-free?*

*Here you'll find the answers to all your bird feeding questions.*

Feeding birds in the garden is a popular activity - over half of adults in the UK feed birds in their garden. That's a lot of extra help for the birds! Providing birds with supplementary food will bring them closer for you to marvel at their fascinating behaviour and wonderful colours. It will also reward them for sharing their lives with you. Feeding birds is also an ideal way to enthuse children about wildlife.

Supplementary feeding can't provide all the natural proteins and vitamins that adult and young birds need, so it's important to create and manage your garden to provide a source of natural foods as well, through well-managed lawns, shrub and flowerbeds. If you provide both natural and supplementary food, your garden will be visited year-round by a host of different birds.

It is important to feed your garden birds responsibly and safely. By following a few simple guidelines, you can play a valuable role in helping your local birds overcome periods of natural food shortage, survive periods of severe winter weather and come into good breeding condition in the spring.

## Hygiene

*When a large number of birds are attracted into an area to feed, the danger of disease increases. Prevention is always better than a cure, and is the best thing you can do to help the birds.*

Most diseases are transmitted by droppings. If contaminated droppings mix with food, the birds run a risk of picking up the infection. Since the contamination can originate either from other birds or from animals (such as rats), it's important to guard against infection from both sources in your garden.

### Top tips for keeping your garden birds healthy

Good hygiene is particularly important during the summer months. The warmer weather can make food go off quicker, and can provide ideal conditions for harmful bacteria.

- Monitor your food supply carefully. If the food takes days to clear, reduce the amount of food you're offering.
- Use a birdtable or hanging feeders. A ground feeding tray is preferable to putting food directly on the ground because it 's easier to keep clean. Food on the ground should all be eaten before nightfall. Rats are attracted to leftover food and often carry diseases, which can affect birds or humans.
- Keep your bird tables and surrounding areas clean and free from droppings or mouldy food, which can provide breeding

grounds for parasites and bacteria. If large amounts of droppings have accumulated, they should be cleared and burnt and the ground cleansed with a disinfectant.

- Clean and wash your bird table and hanging feeders regularly (ideally, using a 5% disinfectant solution), and move feeding stations to a new area every month to prevent droppings accumulating underneath.
- Water containers should be rinsed out daily, especially during the warmer months, and allowed to dry out before fresh water is added. Droppings can accumulate in bird baths.
- Personal hygiene is also important. Don't bring your feeders into your house to clean them - do it outside, using separate utensils. Wear gloves when cleaning feeders and bird tables, and particularly if you need to handle a sick or a dead bird in your garden. Always wash your hands when you've finished.