

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.

What Birds to expect

The most likely visitors to your garden are starlings, house sparrows, blackbirds, blue and great tits, robins, greenfinches and collared doves.

In many gardens Dunnocks, song thrushes and chaffinches will hop around on the ground below the bird table.

In wooded areas you may be lucky enough to see great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches and coal, marsh and long-tailed tits. Look out for blackcaps, too – they are becoming regular visitors to some bird tables in winter.

Thrushes will visit your garden if there is fruit and berries for them to eat: fieldfares and redwings (winter visitors from Scandinavia between October and early April), plus resident mistle and song thrushes and blackbirds.

Feral ring-necked parakeets visit bird tables in south-east England and are spreading west and north.

Siskins and Bramblings can be regular visitors to gardens in some winters.

You may also see Sparrowhawks visiting your garden in search of prey.

Insect-eaters

Insect-eating birds, such as wrens and Treecreepers are unlikely to visit bird tables, but for Treecreepers food can be pushed into cracks in bark and for wrens, put beside an ivy-covered wall, a stump or along a hedge bottom.

Goldfinches are attracted to seedheads of plants such as teasel, and the seed supply can be augmented by refilling the seedheads with nyjer seeds - which they love!