

BIRD FEEDERS

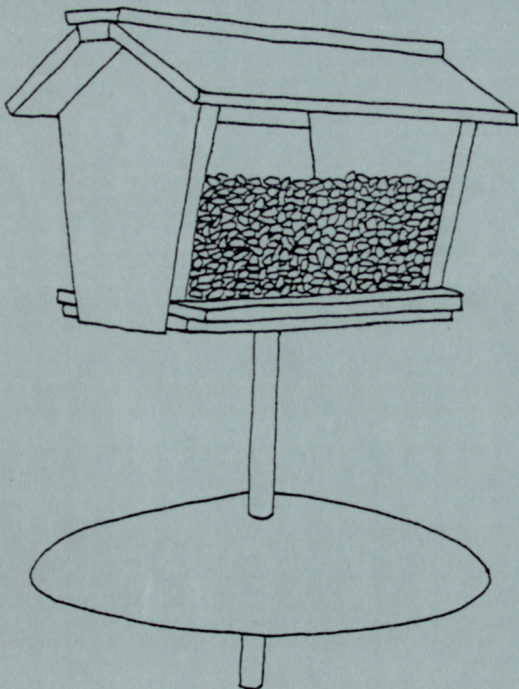
ATTRACTING BIRDS TO WINTER FEEDERS by Geoff Hogan, Charlottetown

Once again it is the time of year to begin thinking of setting up the winter bird feeding station. Many of our summer residents have begun their southern migration, with their northern counterparts close behind. Abundant food is especially important as the birds are putting on extra weight to prepare for their journey south and handouts are always welcome. In addition, some of our winter residents, such as Evening Grosbeaks, are coming in from their summer haunts and will soon establish a winter feeding 'territory'. In the case of grosbeaks, the flocks appear to travel among various feeders within an area so if you would like to be on the 'milk route' it is always best to advertise early. This is true for many species and may be especially important for persons setting up a feeding station for the first time. Let the birds know early where food can be found and they will likely remain with you for the winter or at least long enough for you to enjoy them.

Another very important matter is to be consistent. Once a feeding station is begun and birds come to depend upon it for their food, it must be maintained daily. First, a feeder not regularly attended to will not attract a resident flock of visitors and, second and more important, if food is cut off unexpectedly it may mean life or death to birds with no other food source available.

Two questions often asked are, what kind of feeder should be used and where should it be placed? There are many kinds of feeders available with everything from elaborate multi-tiered structures to simple window sill trays. The majority of these are acceptable providing that the birds are able to feed safely and there are no unnecessary risks involved, such as compartments or mechanisms they may become trapped or entangled in. However, there is no reason to rely on traditional bird feeders when it comes to supplying food. Any handy surface such as a flat roof or rock, tree stump or even the ground (if weather permits) will suffice. Personally, I have found the flat top of an old picnic table to be one of the best locations for maximum results.

Ideally the feeding station will have a variety of sites where food is supplied. Some birds prefer to feed high while others prefer low and, by making both levels available, you are able to cater to the needs of most species. Using only one feeder usually results in attracting a mixed company with one or two dominant species that crowd out the others.



Most people prefer to place feeders close to the house where the birds are easily seen. However, if there are problem species such as starlings, House Sparrows, grackles, etc., it is often effective to place another feeder further away, as many of these birds prefer to feed at a greater distance. Another important consideration is cover. If the feeder is too close to cover, cats may conceal themselves and be a threat to the birds' safety. On the other hand, a feeder too far from cover may cause some birds to feel insecure and they will be hesitant to expose themselves. Generally, a safe distance should not be much over five feet from cover of some kind. Used Christmas trees, with tinsel removed, provide good cover when