



**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
YOUTH FISH AND WILDLIFE CLUB
January 29, 2025: BACKYARD BIRDS
BIRD FEEDING TIPS**



Best practices for feeding wild birds

- Putting up bird feeders in your backyard can be a fun way to watch birds.
- Some birds will come into feed, while others prefer more natural ways to obtain food.
- To learn about birds that will come into bird feeders, and their preferred food of choice, explore this [interactive bird list](#) from [Project FeederWatch](#).
- To provide natural foods for birds, you can search for your local “native plant society” to learn about native trees, shrubs, and plants that attract birds. [Find your state and their associated native plant societies here.](#)
- For hummingbird feeders, only ever use table sugar and water (1 part sugar to 4 parts water). Do not use honey and water, as it can cause bacterial and fungal growth.
- Hummingbirds use their sense of smell to find nectar (or sugar water)! Never add red dye or other additives to the sugar water – natural nectar is clear, and the red dye can be harmful.
- Birds can get sick from moldy or decomposing seeds or spread diseases through their poop. If you put bird feeders in your backyard, remember to wash and clean them once every 2 weeks, or more often if they are heavily used, if there’s been wet weather, or if you notice sick birds or hear reports of disease outbreaks (like salmonella) in your area.
- Be sure to wash your hands after touching bird feeders!
- Bird feeders may also attract natural predators, including birds of prey. Don’t be alarmed if you find a hawk targeting birds at your bird feeders – they need to eat too!
- Birds aren’t the only animals interested in our feeders! If you live in an area with bears, follow local laws about bird feeders. Some places don’t allow bird feeders while bears are active (spring – fall).

How to clean your seed bird feeders

- Take the feeder apart and remove any leftover seeds.
- Use a dishwasher with hot water or hand wash with soap and boiling water.
- You can also soak bird feeders in a solution of diluted bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) for 10 minutes. (Have your parents help!)
- Rinse the feeder with water and allow it to dry completely before refilling.
- Clean the ground below your feeders, too, to prevent a build-up moldy or spoiled food and bird poop, and to avoid attracting unwanted animals like rodents.

How to clean your hummingbird feeders

- Change sugar water every 3 to 5 days to prevent mold and fermentation, which can be deadly to hummingbirds. If you live in a hot climate, change the sugar water more often.
- Don’t use soap or a detergent to wash your hummingbird feeder.
- Clean feeders once a week or more with hot water and a bottle brush, or by filling them with a diluted bleach solution (again, have your parents help!).
- Rinse the feeder thoroughly with water after and allow to dry completely before refilling.