

## BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Ursula Nanna

### FEEDING the BIRDS

As gardeners, we enjoy attracting birds of many species. Once hooked, you'll be designing feeders and experimenting with feed mixes and choice offerings.

Plywood with drainage holes drilled in the bottom can be set on blocks or bricks two feet above ground for doves, towhees, and house sparrows, the ground feeders. Hang prepared plywood from a limb with chain or wire for finches, cardinals, jays, grosbeaks, nuthatches, chickadees, woodpeckers, and titmice. Put a piece of screening down and then fill the tray with sunflower seeds, milo, white proso millet, peanuts, and raisins.

Cylindrical tube feeders with perches are for finches, pine siskins, titmice, and sparrows. Use seeds like niger, grass, and lettuce are for tube feeders with very small holes and little perches.

Globe feeders usually have holes and no perches, these attract birds that like to do some serious gymnastics and feed up side down like chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches.

Post-mounted hopper feeders resemble small barns with a slanted base catch tray. Ground birds, like doves and sparrows, will flock to these feeders, as do cardinals, grosbeaks, and buntings.

Black-oil sunflower seed is the most palatable seed across the bird species. It has a soft black shell easily broken by smaller birds. Striped sunflower seeds have a harder-to-break shell and less heart meat.

Sparrows, juncos, towhees, and grackles and blackbirds like cracked corn. These big birds like the cracked corn so offer it separately and sparingly because the little ones get crowded out.

Niger seed (thistle sterilized not to germinate) is loved by finches, pine siskins, doves, towhees, and juncos. The tiny seeds can be placed in a mesh "sock" so they can perch and eat simultaneously.

Millet is that small reddish-brown seed found in commercial feed with white proso millet most desirable to wrens, doves, sparrows and juncos. And cardinals love oil rich safflower seeds.

Select the correct seeds for the birds you might like to see come to your feeders. It might be good to have several in various places to get a variety. Locate feeders 15 feet from the window or patio. Be patient and don't expect visitors right away, they will come.

Please remember to have water handy in shallow discs for the birds to drink. A birdbath can also be easily made. Just remember to keep the water fresh and change it often. Of course, the squirrels will also beat a path to your feeders, but that is another story at another time!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)