

# Supporting native backyard bird populations



## Provide habitat for birds



*White-throated sparrow*

Providing quality habitat for birds is about more than providing them safe places to build their nests. Birds need water and food sources nearby, especially during the breeding season. By adding bird baths and bird feeders to our yards, we can help support the variety of native bird populations that call Minnesota home.

## Bird baths

Bird baths can be an excellent way to provide fresh, clean drinking and bathing water to some of your favorite species of birds. Bird baths are also a great way to observe local wildlife performing natural behaviors.

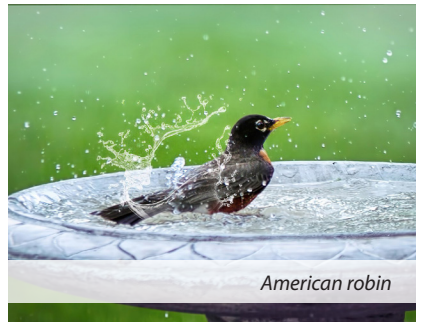
Here are some ways you can encourage birds to use your bird bath:

- Place your bird bath close to shrubs and bird feeders that provide food and cover.
- Add a water feature to attract birds and keep breeding insects at bay.
- Add a heater in the winter to enjoy visiting birds all year.
- Add pebbles or stones to your bird bath for birds to perch on.

If you don't yet have a bird bath but would like one, repurpose a shallow dish or plant tray! Place it on the ground or on a stump and add a few stones to weigh it down. Fill it with about an inch of water and wait for the birds to show up for a bath!



*Gray catbird*



*American robin*

## How to maintain your bird bath



It is essential to keep your bird baths clean to prevent the spread of pests and disease.

Dirty bird baths can be dangerous to your feathered friends and can also create an insect problem for you. The stagnant water of a neglected bird bath may cause poisonous algae to grow and can encourage insects like gnats and mosquitoes to breed. Dirty bird baths can also be contaminated by fecal matter and rotting food,

becoming a breeding ground for harmful bacteria.

Keep birds safe and healthy by regularly cleaning and maintaining your bird bath. Here's some tips from the National Audubon Society ([audubon.org](https://www.audubon.org)) for keeping your bird bath fresh and clean:

- Empty your bird bath and rinse it well every other day before refilling.
- Fill your bird bath with about an inch of water.
- Periodically, use a solution of one part vinegar to nine parts water to scrub your bird bath thoroughly inside and out. Rinse well before adding fresh water.
- Never use detergents or chemicals to clean your bird bath as this can remove important oils from bird feathers.
- Monitor and clean around the base of your bird bath as mold can easily grow.
- The frequency of deep cleaning your bird bath may vary depending on the number of birds visiting and the time of the year, but generally every few weeks is recommended.

Bird baths and bird feeders can sometimes spread dangerous or fatal bird diseases. Help slow the spread of these diseases by following guidance from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. To minimize the risk to our feathered friends, clean your bird baths and bird feeders more frequently or remove them for a while if disease spread is high.

## Bird feeders



*American goldfinch*



*Northern cardinal and chipping sparrows*

There are several different types of bird feeders, including suet feeders, house feeders, tube feeders, and hummingbird feeders, which will each attract different bird species.

Bird feeders can spread bacteria and viruses, and damp bird food can expose birds to mold that can be fatal.

Keep your feeders and bird food clean by:

- Cleaning your feeders once every two weeks with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water. Rinse thoroughly and allow the feeders to dry before refilling.
- Avoiding platform feeders, since these can hold feces and are very difficult to clean.
- Using feeders that keep your bird food out of the elements.
- Not using suet during hot weather. It can turn rancid and melt, dripping all over your yard and feeders.
- Keeping your bird food in sealed containers to prevent it from getting wet or infested with pests.
- Cleaning the ground under your feeders to prevent a buildup of food and feces, which can become moldy and attract unwanted animals.
- Cleaning hummingbird feeders every few days to prevent mold and fermentation of sugars, which can be deadly.

**To prevent the spread of chronic wasting disease among deer, residents of Hennepin County are prohibited from feeding deer. To prevent access to bird food, hang all bird feeders at least six feet off the ground.**

## Provide a nutritious blend



*Ruby-throated  
hummingbird*

Bird feeders are a staple of any wildlife lover's yard, but it's important to do your research to be sure that you're providing a healthy, nutritious mix to your visitors.

**Fruit:** Apples are enjoyed by robins, gray catbirds, blue jays, and northern cardinals. Orange halves are enjoyed by orioles, red-bellied woodpeckers, and red-headed woodpeckers, and grape jelly is loved by gray catbirds and robins.

**Millet mix** is a favorite of mourning doves, chipping sparrows, and indigo buntings.

**Peanuts** are loved by chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and blue jays.

**Mealworms** are a great source of protein for bluebirds, robins, wrens, warblers, gray catbirds, chipping sparrows, northern cardinals, indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and Baltimore orioles.

**Black oil sunflower seeds** are enjoyed by cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, rose-breasted grosbeaks, house finches, and purple finches.

**Suet** is a staple of woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, and wrens.

**Nectar** is great for hummingbirds, warblers, nuthatches, orioles, and woodpeckers. Put out hummingbird feeders by May 1. Never use nectars with any kind of dye. This can be deadly for hummingbirds. See our hummingbird nectar recipe on the back cover.

Other bird feeding tips:

- Offer a diversity of foods in different sized and shaped bird feeders.
- Place bird feeders in clusters in an open area to attract the most variety of bird species.
- Place bird feeders ten feet or more from shrubs or other cover where cats and other predators could hide.
- Place feeders at different heights to attract different species.
- Use baffles to discourage squirrels and raccoons from accessing feeders.
- Plant native fruit and nut-bearing trees and shrubs that provide food for native birds.
- Do not feed ducks bread or other processed foods. Instead, offer peas, cracked corn, oats, lettuce, or earthworms.

# Bird feeder recipes

Always source your bird food from local, bird-friendly sources. Contact us if you would like to create your own bird food mix or would like to know where to find the best quality bird food.

## Pinecone feeder

Ingredients	Instructions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large, dry pinecones found outside</li><li>• Bird seed</li><li>• Peanut butter</li><li>• String or twine</li></ul>	Spread peanut butter on the pinecone and roll in bird seed. Tie string around the cone and hang from a tree branch.

## Hummingbird nectar

Ingredients	Instructions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hummingbird feeder</li><li>• 4 cups water</li><li>• 1 cup refined white cane sugar (never use honey, corn syrup, artificial sweeteners, or raw sugar)</li></ul>	Boil water for one minute. Remove water from stove and stir in sugar until dissolved. Allow mixture to come to room temperature before filling your hummingbird feeder. Wash the feeder thoroughly and replace the nectar every other day. Do not use red dye. It is harmful to hummingbirds. Instead, select a red hummingbird feeder.

### Photo credits

Cover photo: House finch by George B.

Right inside flap: Eastern towhee by Glover B.

Inside left: Gray catbird by Jack Bulmer. American robin by Jill Wellington

Inside middle: American goldfinch by Veronika Andrews, Northern cardinal and chipping sparrows by George B.

Inside right: Ruby-throated hummingbird by Cristina Moidel

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