

Birdscaping Your Home in Winter

Plant native plants

This one almost goes without saying, but say it we will! Birds rely on native plants for food, habitat, and cover throughout the entire year. Meadows, formal gardens, and even forested land are all great places to introduce more native plants to your property.

Native wildflowers like Wild Bergamot and Gray Goldenrod and grasses like Little Bluestem all serve as valuable seed sources in the winter. One of our favorite shrubs is Winterberry Holly, which provide fruits that are prized by Eastern Bluebirds and Hermit Thrushes. And speaking of beautiful red berries, if you have a Nandina in your garden beds, consider giving it the axe! Not only is this shrub invasive, but its beautiful red berries are toxic to birds.

Leave vegetation standing over the winter

We recommend leaving wildflower and grass stems standing tall in your garden until mid-April. Tall stems poke through the snow and provide critical seeds and insects for birds all winter long. Not cutting the stems also allows pollinators and other insects to overwinter.

Keep cats indoors

Outdoor cats kill an estimated 2.4 billion birds (1) in the United States per year. Research has also shown (2) that a cat's mere presence near nesting birds can cause reduced nest visitation, a loss of eggs to other predators, and reduced food deliveries to nestlings. Keeping your cat indoors is safer for cats and it can make a huge difference for our native birds throughout the year.



Turn over for our top tips for winter
bird feeding!



Bird Feeding Tips

Provide high quality food

Bird feeders are a great way to help winter birds when food in the wild is running low. Most backyard birds enjoy black oil sunflower seeds, which can be put out in feeders or just scattered on platform feeders or on the ground. Woodpeckers and nuthatches will appreciate any flavor of suet you put out. An optional offering is Nyjer seeds (in a feeder with tiny slits) that goldfinches love. These bird feeders are most useful between the months of October and March when wintering birds have a hard time finding food.

Minimize window kills

We recommend setting up feeders either less than three feet from your window or greater than 30 feet in order to minimize window kills. Hanging something on the outside of your windows can show the birds that there is a solid object there. We like stringing up lengths of black parachute cord so that they hang over windows. Spaced every six inches, the cords will prevent window strikes but not obscure your view.

Provide cover to minimize predation

Place feeders near cover such as evergreen trees or shrub thickets. Or you can build a small brush pile—the sparrows will thank you!

Keep it clean

It's important to clean your bird feeder regularly to prevent the buildup of mold and bacteria and to reduce disease spread between birds. Aim to clean your bird feeder every two weeks (scan QR code on the right for instructions). It's also a good idea to periodically rake built-up hulls under the feeder to prevent them from getting moldy.



The Clifton Institute