

# Attracting Birds *to your backyard*



A publication of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Wildlife Diversity Program

Oklahomans take an active interest in wildlife. In addition to the consumptive uses of wildlife like hunting and fishing, more and more citizens are enjoying non-consumptive activities such as wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and the study of nature. To enhance the opportunities for viewing wildlife, many people have begun to attract wildlife to their own backyards through feeding and habitat programs.

Because of their flight capability, birds in particular can be readily attracted to a homeowner's yard when it has been designed with wildlife needs in mind. Like all wildlife, birds have three basic requirements for survival: food, water, and cover. Providing the proper combination of these resources takes planning but relatively little effort. Just a few additions or changes can transform your yard into an oasis for birds and other wildlife.



Cover photo of a tufted titmouse by Brad Woods, 2015 Reader's Photography Showcase

Inside cover photo of an white-breasted nuthatch by Glen Gebhart, 2015 Reader's Photography Showcase

One of the simplest ways to attract birds to your yard is by supplementing their natural food sources. To attract the greatest variety of bird species, a feeding program should offer a variety of food.

There are four primary food categories: seeds, fruits, suet, and sugar water.

While some birds will sample foods from more than one category, others are more particular. Robins and mockingbirds, for example, may not come to an offering of seeds but may visit a feeding station stocked with fruit. Insect-eaters like downy woodpeckers may only make an appearance for an offering of suet.

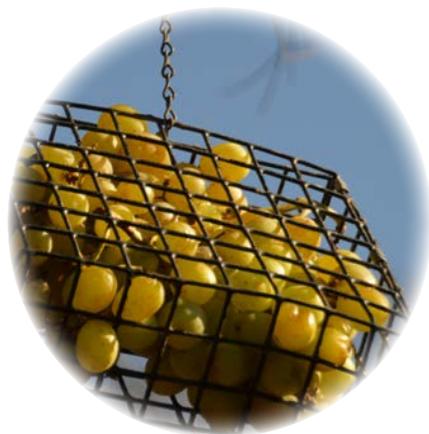


**Adding the following food groups can attract a variety of birds:**

**Sugar Water**  
Hummingbirds  
Orioles



**Suet**  
Woodpeckers  
Nuthatches  
Chickadees  
Titmice  
Brown Creeper  
Wrens



**Fruits**  
Mockingbird  
Orioles  
Robin  
Tanagers  
Cardinal  
Grosbeaks



**Seeds**  
Sparrows  
Finches  
Cardinal  
Towhees  
Grosbeaks  
Buntings  
Juncos  
Blackbirds  
Chickadees  
Titmice  
Doves  
Jays



Another method of encouraging a variety of bird visitors is to present food items at different locations and levels in the yard. This arrangement most closely mimics the foraging opportunities birds find in nature.

Some birds, like juncos and most sparrows, are ground feeders, gathering seeds and other plant materials which fall to the ground. Other birds are more adapted for feeding off the seed heads or in shrubbery and seem to feel more comfortable at a feeder set about tabletop height. Chickadees, titmice, pine siskins and other woodland species naturally feed in the tree canopy. They will readily come to the rims and perches of feeders hanging five to eight feet high. Birds forced to frequent feeders which are out of their natural preferred foraging areas are often ill at ease.

Birds also feel more comfortable at feeders that are located near escape cover (brushpiles, shrubbery, or trees). They fly back and forth from feeder to cover. This behavior actually results in less crowding at

feeders and allows more lengthy and intensive use. If cats are in the neighborhood, it may be a good idea to keep feeders at greater distances from cover than would otherwise be advisable. A good rule of thumb is that feeders should not be much over five feet from cover of some kind.

## Types of Feeders

Bird feeders range from simple, inexpensive, homemade types to a variety of store-bought styles, some quite ornate. Offerings to ground feeding birds can be in a homemade, shallow wooden trough-type feeder. Tabletop-level feeders can also be this simple, mounted on a pole or other stand. The trend in commercial bird feeders has been toward small compact models that protect food from the weather and have features to reduce competition. These include the tube type and globe-shaped hanging feeders.



**Painted Bunting**

The **tube feeder** is a cylinder of clear glass or plastic. There are usually six or more circular feeding outlets provided with perches. This feeder caters to the feeding habits of small woodland birds like the chickadee and tufted titmouse along with the finches – goldfinch, purple finch, and pine siskin. The perches are too small for accommodating larger birds like cardinals and blue jays. Undesirable birds, such as house sparrows and starlings, feel uncomfortable on such an unstable hanging feeder. Globe feeders are also too unstable for less desirable species, particularly since perches are not even provided. The food is held in the center of the plastic globe and the birds perch right on the rim of the circular opening.

**Hopper feeders** usually have a sloping roof, glass or plastic sides, and a small tray where birds can feed. Because of the glass on one or two sides, it is easy to tell at a glance if more food is needed. Larger birds like cardinals feel comfortable at this feeder and it is quite stable, even when suspended.

There are other kinds of feeders, some of which can be attached directly to windows. Some feeders are specifically made for certain food types.



ODWC



ODWC

## Offering Bird Feed

Most people who feed wild birds may not be aware of various bird's preferences and needs. As a result, most people probably use the widely available commercial seed mixes. Some of these seed mixes are good, but others add a lot of filler like buckwheat, milo, and other grains. When buying these mixes, look at the ingredients and select those that contain mostly the more preferred foods like **sunflower seeds** and millet. Buying these seeds in bulk and mixing them yourself can actually save money as well as allow you to offer just those seeds most attractive to birds. A mix of white proso millet and solid black oil-type sunflower seeds is a good one.



ODWC

ODWC



**Thistle**, or niger, a tiny black seed imported from India, is highly desirable to some species including goldfinches and pine siskins. Because niger seed is expensive in comparison to other seeds, a hanging tube feeder, where the birds can take one seed at a time, is the most efficient. Thistle bag feeders are also available but should not be used where there are squirrels as they are easily damaged.

To save money, particularly during times of heavy visitation, try feeding birds a limited amount several times a day. To limit the waste of spilled seeds, many feeders now come with "catch" trays that can be attached underneath. Proper storage of seeds bought in bulk is also important. Leaving

seeds and grain in bags invites rodents, insects and spoilage. A galvanized or plastic trash can with a tight-fitting lid makes a good storage container.

To attract specific birds, offer their preferred seed choices.

Northern Bobwhite	Whole and cracked corn, whole oats, soybean seeds and hay chaff
Mourning Dove	Black oil sunflower seeds, red and white proso millet, German millet, niger
Blue Jay	Peanut kernels; blackstripe, graystripe and back oil sunflower seeds
Carolina Chickadee	Black oil and blackstripe sunflower seeds, peanut kernels
Tufted Titmouse	Peanut kernels, blackstripe and black oil sunflower seeds

Northern Cardinal	Sunflower seeds of all types
Eastern Towhee	Sunflower seeds of all types, red and white proso millet
Song Sparrow	Red and white proso millet
White-throated Sparrow	Black oil and blackstripe sunflower seeds, sunflower kernels and pieces, red and white proso millet, peanut kernels
White-crowned Sparrow	Black oil sunflower seeds, sunflower kernels and pieces, red and white proso millet, peanut kernels and niger
Harris's Sparrow	Sunflower seeds of all types, red and white proso millet, peanut kernels
Dark-eyed Junco	Red and white proso millet, canary seed, finely cracked corn
Purple Finch	Sunflower seeds and kernels
Pine Siskin	Niger, black oil sunflower seeds
American Goldfinch	Niger, black oil sunflower seeds

## Suet

Suet is a food that is particularly useful to certain birds during winter because of its high energy content. Suet specifically refers to the fat located around beef kidneys and loins. This fat has the best consistency for attracting birds. It is not a good idea to use suet during the summer or any time that outdoor temperatures are warm enough to turn it rancid.

Many people enjoy making special "suet cakes" by melting down beef fat and adding mixtures of peanut butter, honey, corn syrup, corn meal, or various seeds and grains. Suet cakes are best suited to elevated plastic or metal baskets or within hanging cheesecloth or mesh bags. In locations where freezing temperatures are the rule, it is recommended that metal baskets have a protective plastic coating. Bare metal may be dangerous to a bird's feet, tongue, or eyes in such weather.





## Fruit

Fruit is appealing to some bird species, particularly those which eat insects during the spring and summer months. Mockingbirds are partial to grapes and raisins. Orioles may come to sliced oranges nailed to branches or wooden posts. Apples set out on the ground or on a low-lying platform feeder are likely to attract robins. Squirrels will also be attracted to this offering.

Sometimes birds will wait until the fruit softens before partaking of it, so don't be too impatient with this offering.

## Sugar Water

A food category which is highly specific to hummingbirds is sugar water. Orioles and a few other species may sample this mixture as well. The best solution is 80 percent water to 20 percent sugar, or a ratio of four to one. Boil the water before mixing the solution and then wash the dispenser with hot water every three days to discourage potentially harmful molds and prevent fermentation. Honey is not recommended for mixing with water; it is a likely medium for the growth of a fungus that can infect the tongues of hummingbirds.

Several types of hummingbird feeders, glass and plastic, are available on the market. A perch at the feeder will encourage hummingbirds to remain there for longer periods of time as well as make the feeder more accessible to other birds.

To increase your chances for success with hummingbirds, be sure to place the feeder near brightly-colored flowers, particularly those kinds that are fed upon by hummingbirds. It is always desirable to provide a natural food source along with an artificial one.



## Providing Water

There is a tendency to overlook the importance of water but providing a source of water for drinking and bathing may attract a greater variety of species than any food offering. It is obvious that birds need water in warm weather, but it may be surprising that their need may be even greater in cold weather – to help them stay warm. Bird feathers contain interlocking webs known as barbules. When in place, these locking feathers shut out the cold and thereby provide proper insulation. It is essential for the feathers to be clean for this interlocking system to work properly so birds actually bathe more in winter.

There are a number of ways to provide water. It can be as simple and inexpensive as water in an inverted trash can lid or as elaborate as a small pond. Probably the most common, however, is the commercial “birdbath”. Some features to look for in a birdbath are gently sloping sides with an average basin depth of no more than 1 ½ inches. A rough cement or other coarsely textured finish suits birds’ needs best. In winter, there is a problem with keeping the water from freezing. The most convenient way is to use an immersion water heater designed specifically for outdoor use. Several varieties are available in garden centers and hardware stores. Some are meant for water deeper than that usually found in birdbaths and are more appropriate for pools and tubs in the garden, but there are some designed to operate at the birdbath depth of one to three inches. Either type should have an automatic thermostat that shuts off the heating element when the water reaches about 40 degrees Fahrenheit.



***Cedar Waxwing***

## Moving Water

Moving water attracts the attention of birds and seems to be highly alluring to them. One of the easiest ways to create moving water is to attach a garden hose to the trunk of a tree and suspend the nozzle directly over the birdbath or pool below. Just a few drips of water at a constant rate is needed. The same effect can be accomplished by hanging a bucket or large plastic bottle four or five feet over the pool with a nail-sized hole punched  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the bottom.



ODWC

## Landscaping for Birds

To attract the greatest diversity of wild birds, it is necessary to go beyond providing supplemental food and water resources. The next step is to manage backyard habitat. With an appropriate landscape design, you can make your backyard a true home for birds and other wildlife.

Unfortunately, many commonly used landscape plants are chosen solely on the basis of appearance rather than for what they offer to wildlife in the way of food or shelter. The most common problem with the typical landscaped yard is that it is not “wild” enough. Most yards are too open. They lack the tangle of trees, shrubs and vines that are found in natural habitats. That is not to say that a yard has to look like a jungle before it is attractive to birds; sometimes just a few inexpensive changes or additions to the plantings is all it takes. The following list offers some suggestions.



***Northern Mockingbird***

- Choose plants for your landscape plan that are of notable use to birds. These include plants that bear fruit, seeds, nuts, or other foods; plant shrubbery which has the branchy growth ideal for nesting sites or escape cover. Try to achieve a combination of plants which will meet bird needs on a year-round basis.
- Create a “layered” effect in the landscaping by planting some of each of the following: large trees, small trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants. Open areas surrounded by plantings is the important concept.
- Maximize habitat edges where different types of plantings meet. This might be where a

ODWC

flowerbed and hedgerow converge or where a hedgerow adjoins trees. These habitat edges are preferred activity centers for birds and other wildlife.

- Include evergreen trees and shrubs in your landscaping plan. Not only do they function as a year-round privacy screen for the backyard, but they also provide critical winter shelter for many wildlife species during inclement weather.



- Be less energetic in removing dead tree stumps, dead branches, leaf litter or harvested garden plants. Dead trees, or snags as they are called, provide food for insect-eaters and homesites for cavity-nesters. The dead branches offer perching areas. Leaf litter and leftovers in your garden provide sources of food. Try letting the branches of some shrubbery go unpruned. This can greatly improve your bird habitat.
- Include some special habitat features. A sizeable brushpile composed of cut branches is a favorite haunt for native sparrows. Place a brushpile near a feeder which is out in the open and you will be surprised by the increased visitation.

## Selecting Landscape Plants



Generally speaking, native plants or those naturalized in the state are best suited to meeting the needs of wildlife. Native plants also tend to be the hardiest – able to withstand the sometimes severe droughts and freezes which Oklahoma experiences. In choosing plants for your landscape plan, it is a good idea to take a soil sample to your local agricultural extension office and have it analyzed as your first step. With this information and the plant lists in this booklet, you can visit your local nursery or other plant distributor and determine what is best suited for your yard. Again, variety is key. Try to include some of the nut-producing trees like oaks, pecans, or walnuts. Berry-producing shrubs like firethorn, blackberry, and elderberry are also good choices. Select a combination of plant species which will meet food and cover needs year-round.

It is important to realize that if you are starting out with only a lawn and new plantings, you may have to wait a few years before you can attract a large variety of birds, particularly woodland species. With bird feeders and a water source, you can draw in some visitors, but what will really be lacking is shelter and the nesting sites.

Herbaceous plants recommended for flowerbeds and borders which offer seeds in fall and winter to Oklahoma wildlife (from Oklahoma Bird Life by F. M. and A. M. Baumgartner).

ODWC



Common Name	Scientific Name	Bloom Season
Aster	<i>Aster sp.</i>	S-F
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudebeckia hirta</i>	S
Chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum sp.</i>	S-F
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis sp.</i>	S
Gaillardia	<i>Gaillardia sp.</i>	S
Marigold	<i>Tagetes sp.</i>	S
Millet, foxtail	<i>Setaria italic</i>	S-F
Millet, proso	<i>Panicum mileaceum</i>	S-F
Portulaca	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	S
Sunflower	<i>Helianthus sp.</i>	S-F
Verbena	<i>Verbena sp.</i>	Sp-S
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia sp.</i>	S

The following lists woody plants mainly native to Oklahoma that provide significant cover, nest sites and/or food to wildlife (adapted from Oklahoma Bird Life by F. M. and A. M. Baumgartner and the Oklahoma Native Plant Society).

<b>Large Evergreen Trees</b>			
Pine (Shortleaf, Loblolly) <i>Pinus sp.</i>	SE	Seed	F-W
Pine (Scotch, Austrian, Ponderosa) <i>Pinus sp.</i>	W	Seed	F-W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Large Deciduous Trees</b>			
Ash <i>Fraxinus sp.</i>	State	Seed	F-W
Black Cherry <i>Prunus serotina</i>	E	Fruit	S
Black Gum <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	E	Fruit	S
Boxelder <i>Acer negundo</i>	State	Seed	F-W
Elm <i>Ulmus sp.</i>	State	Seed	Sp
Hackberry <i>Celtis sp.</i>	State	Fruit	F-W
Maple <i>Acer sp.</i>	State	Seed	Sp
Mulberry <i>Morus sp.</i>	State	Fruit	Sp
Oak <i>Quercus sp.</i>	State	Nut	F-W
Hickory <i>Carya sp.</i>	E-C	Nut	F-W
Pecan <i>Carya illinoensis</i>	C-SE-SW	Nut	F-W
Black Walnut <i>Juglans nigra</i>	E-C	Nut	F-W
Sweet gum <i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	E-C	Seed	F-W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Small Evergreen Trees</b>			
Pinyon Pine <i>Pinus edulis</i>	NW	Seed	F-W
American Holly <i>Ilex opaca</i>	E	Fruit	W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Small Deciduous Trees</b>			
Black Haw <i>Viburnum sp.</i>	E-SW	Fruit	F-W
Chittamwood <i>Bumelia lanuginosa</i>	State	Fruit	F
Flowering Dogwood <i>Cornus florida</i>	E	Fruit	S-F
Hawthorn <i>Crataegus sp.</i>	State	Fruit	F-W
Deciduous Holly <i>Ilex decidua</i>	E	Fruit	F-W
Carolina Buckthorn <i>Rhamnus caroliniana</i>	E	Fruit	F-W
Mesquite <i>Prosopis juliflora</i>	SW	Seed	W
Persimmon <i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	State	Fruit	F-W
Sassafras <i>Sassafras varifolium</i>	E	Fruit	S
Plum <i>Prunus sp.</i>	State	Fruit	S
Serviceberry <i>Amelanchier arborea</i>	E	Fruit	Sp-S
Soapberry <i>Sapindus drummondii</i>	State	Fruit	F-W
Tree Huckleberry <i>Vaccinium arboretum</i>	E	Fruit	F-W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Evergreen Shrubs</b>			
Firethorn <i>Pyracantha sp.</i>	State	Fruit	F-W
Holly <i>Ilex sp.</i>	E	Fruit	F-W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Deciduous Shrubs</b>			
Blackberry <i>Rubus sp.</i>	State	Fruit	S
Blueberry <i>Vaccinium sp.</i>	E	Fruit	S-F-W
Dogwood <i>Cornus sp.</i>	State	Fruit	S-F
Eastern Burning Bush <i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i>	E-C	Fruit	F-W
Chokecherry <i>Prunus virginiana</i>	W	Fruit	S-F
American Beautyberry <i>Callicarpa americana</i>	SE	Fruit	F-W
Elderberry <i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	State	Fruit	S
New Jersey Tea <i>Ceanothus sp.</i>	E	Flower Seed	S F-W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Deciduous Shrubs, Cont.</b>			
Pokeweed <i>Phytolacca americana</i>	State	Fruit	S-F
Rose <i>Rosa sp.</i>	State	Fruit	F-W
Fragrant Sumac <i>Rhus aromatic</i>	E-W	Fruit	F-W
Winged Sumac <i>Rhus copallina</i>	E	Fruit	F-W
Smooth Sumac <i>Rhus glabra</i>	State	Fruit	F-W

	Region	Use	Season
<b>Vines</b>			
Morning Glory <i>Ipomoea sp.</i>	State	Flower	S
		Seed	F
Trumpet Vine <i>Capsis radicans</i>	State	Flower	S
		Seed	W
Virginia Creeper <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	State	Fruit	S-F
Wild Grape <i>Vitis sp.</i>	State	Fruit	S

**Legend**

**Region**

- St. — Statewide
- E — East
- W — West
- C — Central
- NW — Northwest and Panhandle
- SW — Southwest
- SE — Southeast

**Seasons**

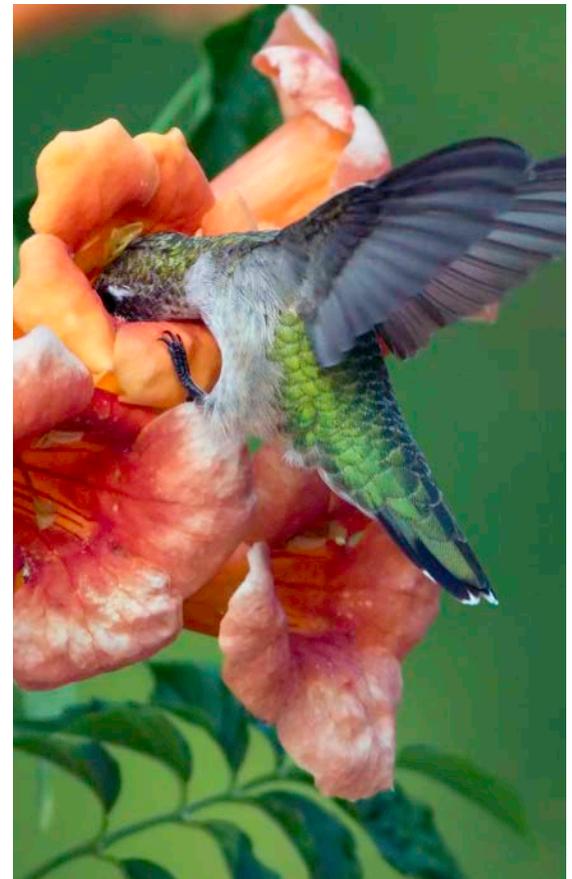
- Sp — Spring
- S — Summer
- F — Fall
- W — Winter



ODWC

Plants that produce flowers highly attractive to hummingbirds in Oklahoma (from Oklahoma Bird Life by F. M. and A. M. Baumgartner).

Common Name	Scientific Name	Bloom Season
<b>Trees and Shrubs</b>		
Azalea	<i>Rhododendron sp.</i>	Sp-S
Buckeye	<i>Aesculus glabra</i>	Sp
Glossy abelia	<i>Abeli grandiflora</i>	Sp-S-F
<b>Herbaceous Plants</b>		
Beard Tongue	<i>Pensetemon sp.</i>	Sp
Bergamot	<i>Monarda sp.</i>	S
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia sp.</i>	Sp-S-F
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia sp.</i>	Sp-S
Evening Primrose	<i>Oenothera sp.</i>	Sp-S
Four O'clocks	<i>Morabilis jalapa</i>	S-F
Gladiolus	<i>Gladiolus sp.</i>	Sp-S
Hollyhock	<i>Althaea sp.</i>	S
Lark Spur	<i>Delphinium sp.</i>	Sp-S
Mints	<i>Menth asp.</i>	Sp-S
Indian Paintbrush	<i>Castilleja coccinea</i>	Sp-S
Petunia	<i>Petunia sp.</i>	S-F
Phlox	<i>Phlox sp.</i>	Sp-S-F
Prickly Pear	<i>Opuntia sp.</i>	Sp-S
Sage (especially red)	<i>Salvia sp.</i>	S-F
Sweet William	<i>Dianthus baratus</i>	S
Yucca	<i>Yucca sp.</i>	Sp-S



Kelly Colgan Azar/Flickr

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird**

### Supplementing Nesting Sites



Hollis Price/RPS2017

Witnessing a pair of birds nest and raise young in your yard can be the ultimate experience in backyard bird watching. To increase the potential for various bird species nesting in your yard, the key again is landscape diversity. Just as various species have different foraging location preferences, they also have differing nest site preferences. Some species are ground nesters while others nest in shrubs and thickets. Still others nest high in the tree canopy. There are also birds that nest only in cavities, usually holes in dead trees. These birds either excavate their own cavity in a snag (dead tree) or use a pre-existing one for nesting. These are the birds that will use man-made birdhouses.

About fifty species of North American cavity-nesters are known to use birdhouses for nesting. Some of the more

**House Finch**

commonly occurring members of this group in Oklahoma are the eastern bluebird, purple martin, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, American kestrel, screech owl, and several wren and woodpecker species. With the clean farming, forestry, and gardening being practiced today, available cavity nest sites are in many areas greatly limited. Putting up birdhouses will often attract these species to backyards for nesting as well as help sustain their populations. It is important to realize however, that many birds including most cavity-nesters are strongly territorial. One pair will not tolerate another pairs nesting nearby. Colonial cavity-nesters such as purple martins are the exception to this rule. For most yards less than a quarter acre in size, three or four birdhouses is the maximum number that will receive use.

## Supplementing Nesting Sites

Wood is the best building material. Metals other than aluminum should be avoided, for they become extremely hot when exposed to a sweltering sun. Rough slabs with the bark left on make ideal material for rustic-looking houses.

Roofs need to be constructed with sufficient pitch to shed water. At least one inch of overhang is needed to protect the entrance from driving rain. Some water may still seep into the house, therefore a few small holes should be drilled in the floor to allow drainage.

Plan for several holes or a slit near the top of the box to provide ventilation in hot weather. The house should be constructed with screws for easy disassembly when cleaning.

Entrance holes need to be near the top of the box and proportional to the size of the bird which will use the house. Houses should have the interior walls roughened or grooved to assist the young in climbing to the opening. There is evidence that birdhouses facing in easterly directions in Oklahoma are most attractive to cavity nesters. Situate the houses where they receive some shade protection. Subdued color tones are best, except for those placed in direct sunlight where white is needed to reflect the heat.



**Carolina Chickadee**

**Different species of birds need houses constructed to suit their particular needs.**

**Chickadees, Titmice, and Nuthatches:** These birds seem to prefer rustic homes built to simulate natural abodes. Old orchards and woodland borders are good places for their houses. Chickadees often nest within a few feet of the ground, but nuthatches and titmice prefer higher elevation.

**Robins and Phoebe:** These birds will use nest shelves when



ODWC

natural nesting sites are unavailable. The shelves should be placed in partial shade along main branches of trees or under the eaves of a shed or porch roof.

**Swallows:** Water near the box will help entice these birds to artificial nests. Open or partially covered nest shelves are best for barn swallows, especially if placed under the sheltering eaves of buildings. Cliff swallows should be provided a narrow shelf under an overhanging roof where they can construct their mud nests.

**Wrens:** Wrens find almost any sort of cavity good enough to suit their needs. Boxes of small size with horizontal slots for entrance are best. The slot opening permits this small bird to carry cumbersome nesting material more readily. Any partially sunlit spot agrees with wrens. A supply of small twigs about three inches long will aid in nest building. It may be best to place several houses in the immediate vicinity, for wrens often build several nests before completing one to its liking.

**Purple Martins:** The gregarious nesting habits of martins will allow the builder to employ skill and imagination in construction. Important factors to consider are coolness and accessibility. A multi-storied apartment house will attract a colony of martins. The availability of water will be a factor in enticing the birds to nest. The houses should be situated in an open space and painted white to reflect heat.

**Bluebirds:** Any type of house with the proper dimensions will suit this birdwatcher's favorite. Orchards and woodland edges are the best location for bluebird houses. The house should be placed four to five feet above the ground.



***Carolina Wren***

Bill Horn



***Eastern Bluebird***

**Flickers:** A rough interior is favored by these birds. A quantity of sawdust, ground cork or small chips should cover the bottom so the birds can shape a nest for eggs. Boxes should be placed above immediately surrounding foliage. A dead snag makes an excellent support for their boxes.

Dwayne Kear/RPS2016

Natural enemies pose the greatest hazard to birds using man-made houses. Iron poles used for mounts or a sheet metal guard encircling trees or wooden poles will help protect birds from cats and snakes.

Ubiquitous house sparrows and starlings can prove exasperating to those attempting to attract native species to birdhouses. Only by persistent harassment can these pests be eliminated. Sparrows can be discouraged by eliminating a perch from the house design and by placing the house a little closer (less than five feet) to the ground. Commercial live traps are available which allow you to remove the sparrows and release desirable birds unharmed. Starlings usually will not inhabit boxes within 10 feet of the ground. But remember, any relaxation of the war against starlings and sparrows will find them reestablished.

If pests can be eliminated and birds find the house satisfactory, the only requirement remaining is cleaning out the old nest materials periodically.

**Different species of birds prefer different dimensions of man-made nest boxes.**

	Floor (in)	Depth (in)	Entrance above Floor (in)	Entrance Diameter (in)	Height above Ground (ft)
Eastern Bluebird	5x5	8	6	1 1/2	5-10
Carolina Chickadee	4X4	8-10	6-8	1 1/8	6-15
Tufted Titmouse	4X4	8-10	6-8	1 1/4	6-15
White-breasted Nuthatch	4X4	8-10	6-8	1 1/4	12-20
Bewick's Wren	4X4	6-8	4-6	1 1/4	6-10
Carolina Wren	4X4	6-8	4-6	1 1/2	6-10
Purple Martin	6X6	6	2	2 1/2	10-30
Great Crested Flycatcher	6X6	8-10	6-8	2	8-20
Northern Flicker	7X7	16-18	14-16	2 1/2	6-20
Red-headed Woodpecker	6X6	12-15	9-12	2	12-20
Downy Woodpecker	4X4	9-12	6-8	1 1/4	6-20
American Robin	6X8	8	1 or more sides open		6-15
Barn Swallow	6X6	6	1 or more sides open		8-12
Eastern Phoebe	6X6	6	1 or more sides open		8-12
Eastern Screech-Owl	8X8	12-15	9-12	3	10-30
Wood Duck	12X12	10-24	12-16	4	4-20

- **How can I keep squirrels from eating all my bird seed?**

This is probably the most frequent question from people who want to feed wild birds. Many of us enjoy watching squirrels in our backyards but the expense of keeping up with a squirrel's appetite while trying to feed wild birds can be discouraging. Again, the idea of feeding limited amounts on a timetable, particularly during milder weather, can save you money. Offer squirrels food at an easy access feeder and this will free up your other feeders for your bird customers.

If this doesn't solve the problem and squirrels are still dominating feeders to the exclusion of the birds, there are other alternatives.

Some bird feeders available commercially are "squirrel proof." If you don't want the expense of a new feeder, you can squirrel proof your own.

With pole supported or hanging feeders you can attach a metal or plastic shield around the access points. Or, suspend your feeders on wires between two supports (beyond jumping distance) and cover the wires with one inch plastic tubing. This makes for very insecure footing for even the acrobatic squirrels.

The challenge in solving the squirrel problem is keeping the feeders out of the jumping range while still close enough to cover needed by the birds.

- **How can I keep birds from flying into my windows?**

Birds usually blunder into windows because of optical illusions. The window may appear to actually be an opening, or it may be reflecting tree branches and look like a perch site or escape cover. To combat this illusion, put something in front of the window that glitters or flutters so that birds will slow down on their approach. Or, attach a paper silhouette of a hawk on the inside of the glass so birds will avoid it.

Birds flying into windows often only momentarily stun themselves. If this happens, the bird may need some assistance against predators while they recover. Place the bird into a darkened container. A paper bag works well. Twist the top and leave the bag in a quiet, safe place for an hour or so. Darkness will keep the bird quiet and prevent possible further injury from struggling. Be sure to release the bird before nightfall or wait until morning.



- **What should I do for baby birds that have fallen out of a nest?**

Generally, it is much better to return an uninjured baby bird to its nest than try to care for the bird yourself. Raising a baby bird takes extreme amounts of time and patience. Feedings must be undertaken regularly throughout the day and provisions made for maintaining a constant warm temperature if the bird is not yet feathered. Often young birds that have fallen from the nest and assumed abandoned have actually not been forgotten by the natural parents. Returning these birds to their own nest or placing them off the ground in nearby trees or shrubbery will allow the parents to resume care. A young bird will not be rejected by its parents just because it has been touched by humans. Most birds have a poor sense of smell.



***Northern Cardinal***

If the young bird has become injured, its chances for survival are questionable. It may be that the most humane solution is to put the bird out of its pain. Remember that the loss of individual animals is a normal occurrence in nature. It is sometimes best to let nature take its course.

- **How do I discourage the starlings and house sparrows from coming to my feeders?**

To solve the sparrow problem, develop your feeding program around small, hanging feeders that offer insecure footing. Avoid offering some of the sparrow's favorite foods like cracked corn, wheat and bread. Sunflower and thistle are also mildly popular with sparrows so they should be offered only in hanging feeders. There is a risk in this method, however, that you may be discouraging other birds like juncos and Harris's sparrows.

Starlings can really be bullies at a feeder. Luckily, they can be more easily discouraged from visiting feeders than house sparrows, without seriously inconveniencing your other guests. Unlike most birds, starlings like to feed late in the morning and early in the afternoon, so try feeding at other times like early morning or late afternoon. Again, avoid bakery items and other scrap type foods if you have problems with starlings. Stick to thistle, sunflower, millet and suet to best encourage desirable native birds while avoiding starlings.

Starlings and house sparrows are not protected by law as are native bird species so they can be trapped and removed.



[wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com)

The Wildlife Diversity Program, a program of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, manages, monitors and promotes rare, declining and threatened species as well as those common species not hunted or fished.

The Wildlife Department does not receive general state tax appropriations. License sales and federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program grant revenues are the main funding sources. Every license dollar spent by sportsmen and women in Oklahoma is used to fund ODWC's user pay/public benefit conservation efforts.