

Backyard Birds

Seed Popularity Ratings if Birds Could Vote

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Making your yard a hot spot for cool birds on the block is easy with delicious bird seed and nearby shelter. Our bird seed popularity rating system is designed to help you pick a single feed or seed mix ingredients birds would request if they could vote. Use our rating system to choose the best bird seed to attract your favorite flyers.

(Visit [A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Birds of Wisconsin](#).)

SEED RATING DEDUCTIONS

FAVORITE: The five bird rating system is based on bird seed types most popular with the widest variety of colorful birds.

SPECIALTY: A key food used to attract a short list of exciting birds receives no deduction for popularity.

LOW MESS: Not important to birds and does not impact ratings.

ALTERNATIVE: Unfavored by squirrels and/or blackbirds if dominating feeders.

SPOILER ALERT: Foods that go rancid quickly and can lead to feeder diseases.

FILLER: Low vote seed used in cheap mixes.



Black Oil Sunflower Seeds

Favorite



Blackbirds	Juncos
Blue Jays	Nuthatches
Buntings	Pine Siskins
Cardinals	Redpolls
Chickadees	Sparrows
Doves	Titmice
Goldfinches	Woodpeckers
Grosbeaks	
House Finches	



If birds could vote on one feeder food, black oil sunflower seed would probably be second, but it's not quick to spoil. The seeds have papery thin shells, allowing both small and large birds to easily crack the hulls and enjoy this high-calorie, high-fat food. Compared to the heavy-hulled striped sunflower seed, you get more seed per/lb. Offer this seed year-round. Black oil sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) are commercially grown for culinary oil production.

Hulled Sunflower Seeds

Favorite



Blackbirds	Low Mess
Blue Jays	Spoiler Alert!
Buntings	Juncos
Cardinals	Nuthatches
Chickadees	Pine Siskins
Doves	Redpolls
Goldfinches	Robins
Grosbeaks	Sparrows
House Finches	Titmice
	Woodpeckers



Unsalted, hulled sunflower seeds attract the most species. Even birds that don't love seeds, like robins, would vote for them. Although hulled seeds are a more expensive bird feed, you get more seed/lb. with this low-mess option. Without the protective shells, hulled sunflower seeds are prone to spoiling quickly. Offer no more than a one to two-day supply when hot. If you don't have time to monitor feeders daily, offer black oil sunflower seed as a safer alternative.

Shelled Peanuts

Favorite



Blue Jays	Low Mess
Cardinals	Spoiler Alert!
Chickadees	
Grosbeaks	
Nuthatches	
Titmice	
Woodpeckers	
Wrens	



Peanuts would earn a five bird rating by an all-star cast of backyard birds ... if they could vote. Shelled peanuts are a low mess option. Do not offer salted peanuts. Salt dehydrates birds, especially in winter when water is scarce. Peanuts quickly develop a mold (*Aspergillus flavus*) that produces aflatoxins, causing illness or death. Don't leave shelled peanuts out more than one to two days in humid, hot weather.

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Striped Sunflower Seeds

Favorite



Blue Jays
Cardinals
Chickadees
Grosbeaks
Nuthatches
Titmice
Woodpeckers



Striped sunflower seeds are a favorite of birds with bills strong enough to crack open the heavy hulls. The thick shells protect the seeds from spoiling rapidly. The trade-off is more shell clean-up. If your feeders are inundated with blackbirds and House Sparrows, striped sunflower seeds are an excellent solution to deter them. For that reason, one could argue striped sunflower seeds deserve five birds in the rating system.

Suet Cakes

Specialty



Blue Jays
Chickadees
Nuthatches
Titmice
Woodpeckers

Low Mess
Spoiler Alert!

*Other birds eat suet, but this is the short list of suet cake fanatics.)



Suet is the fat surrounding kidneys and loins of cows and sheep. Lard can be a substitute. Suet cakes may include fruits, cracked corn, sunflower seeds or mealworms. The fat gives birds high energy reserves to survive winter. Suet can coat belly feathers, which can clog the pores of incubating eggs. In hot and humid weather, it melts and quickly becomes rancid. Suet cakes with peanuts may be voted number one by woodpeckers.

Nyjer Seed

Specialty



Finches
Indigo Buntings
Goldfinches
Pine Siskins
Redpolls

Low Mess



Nyjer seed (*Guizotia abyssinicia*) hands-down wins the number one vote of American Goldfinches. To attract them you'll do best with a mass of Purple Coneflowers nearby. Nyjer seed is a great low-mess option. Often inaccurately labeled "thistle" seed, nyjer is not related to thistle weeds. It's the only wild bird feed imported to the U.S. (primarily from Ethiopia and India). Seed sterilization is a USDA condition of entry.

Cracked Corn

Favorite



Blackbirds
Blue Jays
Cardinals
Chickadees
Doves
House Finches
Grosbeaks
Juncos

Low Mess
Spoiler Alert!

Sparrows
Titmice
Woodpeckers



Cracked corn is a favorite of desirable birds and over-subsidized birds and animals. Corn is highly susceptible to developing a mold (*Aspergillus flavus*). The mold produces aflatoxins which cause illness and death in birds, mammals and humans. Don't leave cracked corn out more than one to two days in moist, humid or hot weather. Aflatoxins are most active in hot, humid and wet weather. Aflatoxins are suppressed at temps. below 55°F and over 104°F.

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Safflower Seed

Alternative



Cardinals
Chickadees
Doves
Grosbeaks
Sparrows
Woodpeckers



Cardinals are known to be huge fans of safflower bird seed. This high-protein food is a good option if you have a squirrel or blackbird problem. Blackbirds typically do not eat it. Deterring squirrels with safflower seed can get mixed results, but it's not their favorite. Try gradually transitioning from black oil sunflower to safflower seed until you are mostly offering this alternative option. This will help your regular visitors get used to the taste of safflower.

Whole Peanuts in Shell

Specialty



Blue Jays
Chickadees
Nuthatches
Woodpeckers

Spoiler Alert!



Whole, unsalted peanuts in the shell would get top votes from Blue Jays and woodpeckers. These nut-lovers have bills strong enough to open the heavy seed hulls. The amazing colors and patterns of these birds may be worth paying more for this favorite food. Crows and squirrels love peanuts too. Offer whole peanuts in a wire wreath feeder designed for peanuts in the shell. They spoil slower than unshelled seeds.

White Proso Millet

Filler



Blackbirds
Cardinals
Doves
House Finches
Indigo Buntings
Juncos
Sparrows

Woodpeckers



White proso millet (*Panicum miliaceum var.*) is a favorite of many ground feeding birds like doves, sparrows and blackbirds. If you want to attract more diverse visitors, the best bird seed mixes have a low ratio of white millet. Birds will eat better options first like sunflower seeds, peanuts and corn and will discard less desirable seeds on the ground.

Whole Corn Kernels

Alternative



Blue Jays
Cardinals
Doves
Grosbeaks
Woodpeckers

Low Mess
Spoiler Alert!



Whole corn kernels are liked by birds with beaks strong enough to crack the seed. It's probably not going to get votes if cracked corn bird seed is available. Squirrels love corn in any form. Offering a full corn cob on a spike or corn cob feeder placed far from your bird feeders is one method to keep squirrels occupied and away from your. Feeding oversubsidized squirrels, however, is generally discouraged.

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Red Proso Millet

Filler



Blackbirds
Doves
House Finches
Junco
Sparrows



Red proso millet (*Panicum miliaceum var.*) may be listed as **common millet, broom corn millet, hog millet, red proso, millet or red millet**. It is less favorable to birds in the eastern U.S. than white proso millet. Red, yellow and white millets are fillers, and they comprise a high percentage of cheap seed mixes.

Rice & Other Grains

Filler



Blackbirds
Doves
Sparrows

Low Mess
Spoiler Alert!



The warnings against endangering birds with wedding rice are urban legends. Grains like buckwheat, oats, rice and wheat are natural food sources. Sometimes they are used as filler in bird seed mixes. Rice, however, ranks at the bottom in seed popularity at feeders. It's prone to spoiling quickly. Offering unused kitchen scraps is OK to save waste, but don't offer processed cereals with sugar and other additives.

Milo

Filler



Doves



If birds could vote, even doves may not raise a wing for this seed. Milo is a type of sorghum grain that is considered unfavorable to birds in the eastern U.S. It's generally eaten by western groundfeeding birds. Regardless, low quality mixes, often found in grocery stores, may include a high percentage of milo filler. Birds will discard this seed on the ground, resulting in wasted food.

Seed Mixes



The seed mix pictured to the left is a higher quality seed mix with a high content of sunflower seeds. The best bird seed mixes attract more interesting visitors. The bird seed mix pictured right is primarily comprised of filler. The millets do not attract a variety of colorful birds and are often discarded on the ground as birds pick out preferred food. Cheaper mixes produce more waste.

