



# BACKYARD nature center News

March/April 2020 • Issue 57

## Looking For Spring



Written by  
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*Master Gardener and*  
*Avid Backyard*  
*Birdwatcher*

As the temperatures creep up, I am itching to get outside and rake, clean out garden beds, freshen up nest boxes and most of all tidy up the tube feeders and platform feeders! The yard looks so brown and grey with very little green anywhere but I still want to get out there. Windows have been closed up all winter and I have missed the birds calling to one another. An immature Coopers Hawk sitting on the screech owl house has made my bird feeding somewhat erratic but still good. I can't wait to plant more bushes for the birds to find cover in. Some twenty five plus turkeys have been daily visitors to our platform feeders doing lots of thrashing around with their enormous feet tearing up the mulched areas and mostly making a mess. I know that they will be thinning out for spring soon and that area will look

a bit more tidy, but it sure has been a unique thing to enjoy turkeys in a neighborhood with houses all around. Sometimes things get messy, but what a treat!

Our small garden pond has been mostly frozen over all winter except the water fall. We keep the water flowing all year long because every bird in the neighborhood seems to enjoy the small streams flowing over the rocks. There has been so much drinking and bathing all winter. Clusters of robins and Cedar Waxwings can't resist having a feast from the berry bushes at the top of the waterfall, then dropping down to clean their feathers and have a drink. Looks like quite a social gathering. I can see the fish now and I am tempted to toss them some fish food, but the water temperature is still not warm enough, they need to stay in their lazy torpid state a little longer.

There has been an abundance of goldfinch at the feeders lately. Still drab, some looking a bit olive in color, you can't mistake the black wings with white stripes. By the next newsletter they will

be bright yellow! Nick and I are convinced that you will get two to three times the activity on your finch feeders if you fill them with fine sunflower chips rather than using straight nyjer thistle. Be sure your finch

feeder is protected from squirrels though. They really don't care for thistle but will love your sunflower hearts! You may also have colorful House Finch, Downy Woodpeckers and chickadees there too. It seems like spring is just begging to come. I saw a downy male feeding a female, I'm sure they are eager to get started with their nesting. Cavity nesting birds can get started as early as February, building their nests in the warmth and protection of a house.



Remember, our songbirds have feasted on last fall's harvest of seeds and berries all winter long. As we come into spring the birds become active with feeding young, and making tireless trips back and forth to the feeders to keep their own energy up. If you want to see more birds than you did in the winter, don't take your feeder down! Keep feeders fresh with the best seed and you will be rewarded with color and beautiful harmony in your own backyard.



# SQUIRRELS.... LOVE 'EM OR HATE 'EM?



seeds are not retrieved and grow into plants in the spring. Squirrels' winter survival is dependent on remembering where he has deposited his caches. And what's fascinating is that the portion of his brain that controls memory actually grows by 15% in fall, so it's believed that squirrels really do remember where they stored all those nuts.

Squirrels can jump a distance of up to 20 feet while in the trees and can fall up to 100 feet without hurting themselves. They have long, muscular hind legs and short front legs that work together to aid in leaping, and their hind legs are double-jointed.

This helps them run up and down trees quickly. They'll use their tail both for balance and as a parachute as they leap from tree to tree. They have five



toes on their back feet and four toes on their front. When trying to keep squirrels off your bird feeder, keep in mind their ability to jump straight up 4' and horizontally 6-8'. May as well offer them an accessible treat in a feeder easy for them to manage and away from the bird feeders. Special note: if you find your bird feeder on the ground in the morning, or missing all together, don't lay blame on the squirrels. They sleep at night but Racoons do not and that's a story for another day!



"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

- Chief Seattle

People watch and feed squirrels almost as much as they do the birds! Whether you think squirrels are adorable little fur balls, or think of them as "tree rats". Squirrels are extremely intelligent and interesting animals!

Squirrels have been around for a long time- a squirrel's habit of gathering and storing food for the winter has allowed the species to survive for more than 35 million years! And to compensate for wear and tear, their teeth never stop growing. That's why squirrels seem to chew everything-they gnaw on things to keep their teeth "filed down." Squirrels even grind their teeth in their sleep! And contrary to the opinion of some birders, a squirrel's stomach is not a bottomless pit. They need about a pound of food per week and enjoy a nice varied diet of bugs, nuts, fruit, seed and corn!

Ecologically squirrels are important re-seeders of trees and woodland plants, busily burying their stash of nuts and seeds in preparation for winter. A squirrel can hide as many as 10,000 nuts each fall and can find his buried food under as much as a foot of winter snow. Some of these nuts and

*\*Special Note: New product.*



If you'd rather not feed squirrels, try our new "**SMOKIN HOT CHIPS**", loaded with cayenne pepper that squirrels, sensitive taste buds, don't want anything to do with and the birds love it!



20% off any squirrel feeder and bagged squirrel corn or Critter Crunch feed

C200431: Good through April 31, 2020

# Bird Feeding Preference

Want to know why we carry only the “good stuff” in our seed mixes. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel. The Preference guide below is our standard, our Bible. There is no reason to put milo, wheat, flax or rape seed in our mixes, nobody eats them and they end up germinating on the ground or spoiling. Most bargain seed found in big box stores are about 20% filler, and generally has been sitting on the shelf for a long time. We have presented the Bird Feeding Preference Guide in the newsletter before. This guide is based on extensive field studies done by the National Wildlife Federation over many years of observation and documentation. Offer the best quality, freshest, and cleanest seed heavy on Black Oil Sunflower, nuts, white millet and safflower, we know you’ll enjoy the results! So will the birds!



## RECYCLE “ED

These days we all strive to be as responsible with our household trash and recycling as possible but, in spite of our efforts, we’re still hearing that 90% of it ends up in the landfill. What’s up with that? Are there no buyers for the plastics, glass and paper products on the secondary market? Now that China no longer buys our recycling, that could be true. But do we really want to send it to China? That’s a long way to go and a lot of fuel and effort is put into that transfer anyway. Wouldn’t it be better to process it in the U.S.? Was it something else? Did we forget to take a cap off the plastic water bottle? Was there a label that should have been removed from a prescription bottle? Did we put all our soda bottles in a big PLASTIC BAG and the whole thing was rejected? These are questions we’d all like answers to. There seems to be a lack of good education regarding just how we can make this process a success.

**In our area, [prokansasrecycling.org](http://prokansasrecycling.org) is a great place for answers! Take a peek, be enlightened!**

**HAPPY RECYCLING!**  
Ed

BIRD	SEED/FOOD CHOICE											FEEDER STYLE							
	BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER	SUNFLOWER CHIPS	STRIPPED SUNFLOWER	WHITE MILLET	THISTLE/NYJER	WHOLE CORN	CRACKED CORN	SAFFLOWER	SHELLED PEANUTS	PEANUTS IN SHELL	SUET	FRUIT/JELLY	NECTAR	MEALWORMS	TUBE	HOPPER	PLATFORM	PEANUT	SPECIALTY
CARDINAL	*		+					+						+					
CHICKADEE	*	+						+	*		+			+	*	+			+
TUFTED TITMOUSE	+	+							*		+			+	*	+			*
AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	+	*			+										*	+	+		
PURPLE FINCH	*	*													*	+	+		
HOUSE FINCH	*	*			+			+			+				*	+	+		
PINE SISKIN	+	*			*										*	+	+		
NUTHATCH	*	+							*		*			+	+	+	+		*
BLUE JAY	+		+			+	+		*	*	*				+	+	*	*	*
DOWNY WOODPECKER	+	*							*	*	*			+	+	+		*	*
HAIRY WOODPECKER	+	+							*	*	*			+	+	+		*	*
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER	+	*							*	*	*			+	+	+		*	*
FLICKER	+	*	+						*	*	*				+	+		*	*
COMMON GRACKLE	*	*	+			+	*		*					+	*	+			
HUMMINGBIRD												*							*
EASTERN BLUEBIRD		+											*	+		+			*
WREN		+									+			*	+				*
ORIOLE		+									*	*	+	+					*
WHITE CROWNED SPARROW	+			*			+											*	
WHITE THROATED SPARROW																			
HOUSE SPARROW	+	+		*			+								+	+		*	
HARRIS SPARROW	+			*			+											*	
JUNCO	+	+		*			+											*	
STARLING		+					*	*	*	*	*	*			+	*	+		
BROWN HEADED COWBIRD	+			*			+								+	*		*	
MOURNING DOVE	+			*	+		+	+										*	
TOWHEE	+			*			+											*	
DUCK, GOOSE	+			+			*	*										+	
AMERICAN CROW	+						*	*										*	
RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	+	+		*											+	*		*	
QUAIL	+			*		+	*											*	

+ = PREFERRED \* = FAVORITE

## What is it about a Cardinal?



What is it we fall in love with every time we see one at the feeder

Sometimes it’s like there’s no other bird we want to attract! Sometimes it’s like there is no other bird that sings so sweetly! Sometimes it’s like there’s no other bird who feeds his mate in such a caring, loving way, lowering, turning his head slightly like the gentle kiss of a prince waking his sleeping beauty. Could it be the fact that he helps build the family nest, or helps feed the young? Yeah, give mom a break! The only thing he doesn’t do is relieve the female while incubating. But, come on, he still loves her. He just has no bald incubating patch on his belly. Not that we’re so vain and hooked on looks but, how many backyard birds are scarlet-red, with a crest that crowns his glory and literally says “look at me, look at me, I’m pretty, pretty, pretty!” I guess I just answered my own question! What a bird!

**BACKYARD  
nature center**

*For people who feed and care for backyard birds*  
The Shops at Tallgrass  
8336 E. 21st Street, #500 • Wichita, KS 67206  
www.backyardnaturecenter.com  
**316-683-2121**

**STORE HOURS**

**OPEN 7 DAYS WEEK**

Monday–Saturday: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:  
WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM

**\*Join us March 11 at 12pm for a  
“Botanica Lunchtime Lecture”  
entitled “Purple Martin Success”!**

## Purple Martin Readiness True or False Quiz!

**Q. Purple Martins are completely dependent on human supplied housing.**

**True**, because of their long relationship with man, and the lack of natural tree cavities, Purple Martins, the only colonizing species in the North America, have gone through a behavioral shift and now nest exclusively in man-made housing.



**Q. If I don't get my house out early, I'll miss the “scouts”!**

**False**, the first martins to arrive are simply adults who go back to where they nested the year before. They will not be looking for a new house. Last year older male and female adult martins started arriving here at the house in our parking lot on March 17th. That's soon, I know. No need to open up all the compartments as yet. If you do, you will start fighting sparrows and starlings immediately. Be sure to check regularly to make sure no other nest competitors have begun nesting. One sparrow or starling will intimidate and possibly kill the first martin arrivals. Be vigilant.



**Q. It's too late to put up a New house in April.**

**False**. If you did not have martins nesting last year, or if you are putting up a new house, don't get in a hurry. You are going to attract the young, first year birds, called sub-adults. You'll enjoy watching the arrival of the adults and sub-adults on maps documented by landlords all over the country who are reporting to the PMCA website. The website for the Purple Martin Conservation Association is: [purplemartin.org](http://purplemartin.org). It will amaze you to see how the sightings progress north. You'll be informed and ready for success!

**15% off any purple  
martin house or  
martin gourds.  
In stock only.**

C200430: Good through April 30th, 2020.