



BACKYARD nature center News

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Outsmarting our Furry Friends

The first recorded case of bird feeding took place in the 6th century. I am sure the first case of a squirrel attacking a bird feeder took place the next day. So the battle began, and after more than 1,500 years the battle continues in our backyards. With some of the new feeders and baffles it is a battle that can be won.

For years people have been working in their yards at ways to keep squirrels out of their feeders. Why bother? Well, squirrels store food for future use, so unless they are controlled they can empty your feeder in a day. Some people have set up separate areas and feeders just for squirrels. Others have taken on the challenge of keeping squirrels out of feeders with the ingenuity that would make Rube Goldberg green with envy. And a great many have determined that squirrels are just too smart and give up.

The fact is that squirrels are very industrious when it comes to getting at bird feeders. It seems that they share information with each other and must have their own internet where they work together to develop plans on how to get at the food. There are even rumors of steroid abuse by some squirrels allowing them to make impossible jumps from trees and buildings to feeders.

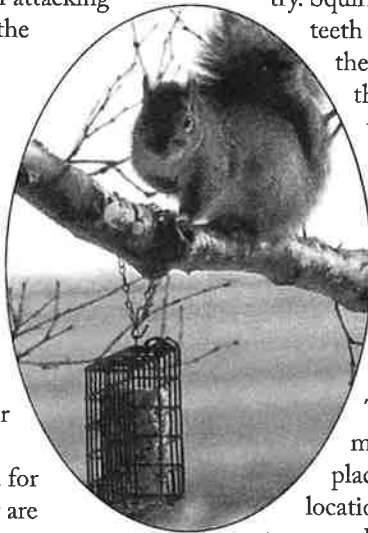
They seem to be able to chew through anything—or at least will try to. In fact, they can chew through many

soft metals such as aluminum and tin. Steel seems to defeat them, but they will try. Squirrels need to chew—their teeth never stop growing and they have to keep wearing them down. So, if you wonder why they may be chewing on your metal railing, it is not because they have learned to eat metal; they are just doing what squirrels do.

So How Can We Stop Them?

The first thing to keep in mind is that you want to place your feeder in a location where it is easy for you to see and observe the birds. Once you have your location picked, it is a matter of choosing the correct method of squirrel proofing that will work in your area. There really are only two ways to do this. You either prevent them from getting to the feeder (baffling the feeder) or pick a feeder that is squirrel-proof.

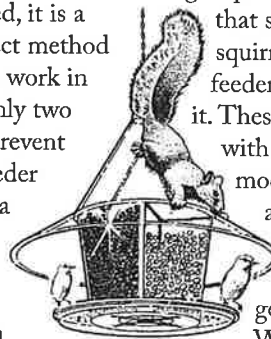
A very effective way to keep the squirrels from your seed is to put the feeder on a pole or Shepard's crook. Since squirrels can climb most poles, keep in mind the following stats of these furry athletes. A squirrel can jump about eight feet straight out from a tree. They can also jump straight up almost four feet. So, if you want to prevent a squirrel from getting to your feeder the baffle should be placed on a pole between four to five feet off the ground and eight feet from trees.



There are a variety of baffles available for different types of poles. We will be glad to help you find the correct one. If installed properly, this is a very effective way of keeping your feeders squirrel-free.

In some cases you just cannot get the clearance from the trees, decks or house that you need to get the baffle to be effective. In that case you need a squirrel-proof feeder. One of the most popular squirrel-proof feeders ever made is the Yankee Flipper by Droll Yankee. This feeder is designed to spin the perch ring when anything weighing more than one pound gets on it and flips the squirrel off.

Another very effective squirrel-proof feeder is the Squirrel Buster series. This group of feeders uses the principle that since you cannot keep the squirrel off the feeder, make the feeder close when a squirrel gets on it. These feeders come in various sizes with different features to accommodate your requirements. They are as effective as the Flipper but do not have the comic relief of seeing the squirrel get flipped off the feeder.



While the war with squirrels is still ongoing, I can say with confidence that we have at least come to a standoff. Squirrels will keep on trying—they cannot help it; it is their nature. And if they are not on the feeders, they do a great job of cleaning what falls to the ground. Enjoy watching the birds at your feeders, and maybe look at the squirrels a little differently as they try to figure out how to win the war.

Gardening from the Ground Up

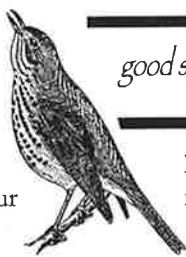
by Natalie Brewer, Master Gardener

I enjoy living in an area with four seasons. Each season brings to us its own sense of wonder, delight and beauty. Winter is one of my favorite seasons. Birds flock to feeders, icicles dangle from roofs, and snowflakes dance on the edge of wind currents providing a symphony of sights and sounds that no other season can offer. In addition, winter is a good time to sit back and contemplate the previous gardening season and make plans for the future one. So let's go back to the basics and talk about the most fundamental and important part of gardening, the soil.

It is possible to garden in poor soil, or in any kind of soil, for that matter. However, it will restrict your plant possibilities. So the best course of action is to create a soil that is hospitable to the majority of flora. Good soil is dark in color, crumbly in texture, moisture retentive, and full of life. Good soil was everywhere until the bulldozers came in to build our houses and carted it off for a profit. So most homeowners are left with a hard, compacted clay soil. But do not worry. Clay is a healthy component of soil and is full of nutrients that are vital to plant health. Clay just needs a little help so that plants can access those

nutrients. The trick to creating good soil is to mimic what nature does and to build up the topsoil layer. After all, Mother Nature has been creating soil for eons and knows how best to do it.

It takes time to create good soil. But every year makes a difference. Just like in nature when leaves drop to the ground creating a natural mulch, gardeners should add an organic mulch annually to garden beds and around trees. Organic mulches break down into the soil and can include mulches such as



good soil is not only good for plants, but is also good for birds.

hardwood shredded mulch, pine needles, leaf mould, shredded leaves, compost or cocoa hulls. I recommend organic mulches as opposed to inorganic (rocks, weed paper, plastic, or rubber mulch) which do not decompose. It is the process of decomposition that will work its magic in your garden.

You can start creating good soil now, by not bagging your leaves, and then follow up in the spring, by applying an organic mulch. Just like any mulch, be sure that leaves are not covering the base (or crown) of plants. Many gardeners remove leaves from their yards, bag them and have them hauled off. Leaves are a gardener's, and a bird's, best friend. They add nutrients to the soil, encourage worms, help birds, provide homes for frogs, and are a free and invaluable resource. Shredding leaves will help to break them down

quicker and reduce the 'messy' appearance. When leaves are too plentiful in my flower beds, I like to rake them out, run over them with the mower, and then throw them back in. You may look a little crazy to the neighbors when throwing leaves back into your garden, but they're the ones who are crazy not to use this resource.

The benefits of healthy soil are numerous to birds and other wildlife. Healthy soil means healthy plants that

require little care, no pesticides, and no fertilizers. Pesticides and fertilizers are both detrimental to the health of our birds and other

wildlife. You will also notice more birds coming to your yard. Ground foragers, such as thrushes, sparrows, and warblers will become more frequent visitors to your garden. Soils that are loose and crumbly are easier for birds to dig around in and pull out that juicy worm, crunchy millipede, or tiny seed. And soils that are healthy encourage biological activity which provides extra nutrition in the form of insects for all birds. In the fall, leaf litter that is left in gardens is a favorite haunt of worms and other decomposers. American robins, wrens, and brown thrashers particularly enjoy digging around in rotting leaves to find nutritious treats.

Soil health is easy, takes a bit of time, and can be low cost. And good soil is not only good for plants, but is also good for birds.



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OR
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Not to be combined w/ other offers. Limit one coupon per customer. Must present coupon at time of purchase.

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SPECIES PROFILE:

Carolina Wren

There is a lovely little brown bird who shows up at our feeders each winter. He is a wonderful shade of rufous brown above and a striking orange-buff below. The head has a white eyebrow and a whitish throat and from that throat comes one of the loudest songs per volume of any bird!

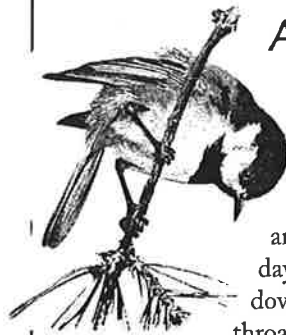
The Carolina Wren is a common wren in the eastern half of the United States. His range runs from southern Ontario to the extreme northeast of Mexico. Unfortunately, this lovely songster is very sensitive to cold weather. Gradual increases in temperatures over the last century have allowed a northward expansion, but, when very cold winters hit, we see crashes in their populations. But, no fears here. The Carolina Wren has a very high breeding rate and so the population quickly rebounds.

Why do we see more of this bird at our feeders during the winter? Well, the wrens normal diet consists of insects (and sometimes a small lizard or tree frog!!). In the winter, when these foods are hard to find, the wren switches over to a diet heavy in seed and berries. Our feeders provide these life saving morsels and they are very quickly found by these inquisitive guys.

Males are very outgoing and they are the songsters. (One captive male reportedly sang some 3000 times in one day!) They are happy to sing whenever and wherever they are. Their "tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle" call is very distinctive and is a beautiful thing in the middle of winter since most other birds become much quieter at this time. The male sings to attract females of course, and the breeding pairs may stay together to feed. The males and females work together to build their nests. These nests can be found just about anywhere... branches, tree-holes

and stumps, but also mailboxes and windowsills!

Keep your suet and/or peanut feeders full and you will very likely see this remarkable bird throughout the cold winter months. Both you and the wrens will be better for it!



All I needed to know ... I learned from a Chickadee!

As we start into the holiday season, do we sometimes find it difficult to step back from the bustle and really appreciate all we have? I say, take a look at a chickadee and learn from his positive attitude. On the coldest of days, he flits around happy at being equipped with built in down underwear! After weeks with out fresh water and a throat that is so dry, he celebrates the trickle of melted snow and drinks it as though it were champagne! A chickadee seems to find good fortune in the very act of looking, perhaps knowing that a cheerful eye sees more clearly than one clouded with despair. A few frozen insects wedged in the crevices of tree bark constitute a Thanksgiving feast. Sunflower seed feeders and suet cakes provide dining for a king. Every minute it sucks in more than sixty-five breaths of fresh air. A chickadee weighs a mere ten grams—you could mail three of them with a single postage stamp—but the energy and enthusiasm with in its tiny frame would dwarf Santa Clause.

As the rush of the holiday season approaches, let us all be cherry and thankful like a chickadee.



Henry David Thoreau

This morning it has begun to snow, apparently in earnest. The air is quiet still, yet some flakes come down from one side and some from another, crossing each other like warp and woof apparently, as they are falling in different eddies and currents of air. In the midst of it, I hear and see a few chickadees prying about the twigs of the locusts in the graveyard. They have come into town with the snow. They now and then break into short, sweet strain, and then seem suddenly to check themselves, as if they had done it before they thought.

—December 15, 1858



Roosting Pockets

Made of natural materials, these roosting pockets are used by many small birds in the winter months. Birds stay warm and dry in these charming woven homes. We suggest adding a few to your garden. Tuck them in nooks and crannies in the yard and let them provide essential protection from the elements. They add charm year round and sometimes will be used in the spring for nesting.



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–Friday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

 Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m. 

HOLIDAY HOURS:

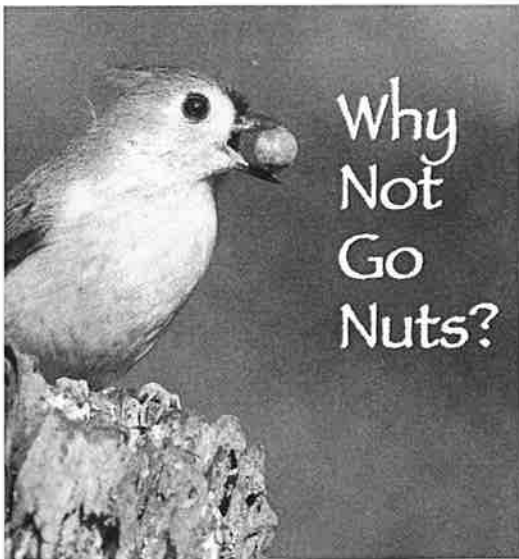
Closing Early Christmas Eve

Closed Christmas Day

Open New Year's Day



*Season's Greetings
from our nest to yours!*



This is the time of year when many of us are stocking up on seed. Since we know we will be feeding all fall and winter, it makes sense to load up. But think of a few things before you do...

- 1) Can you store the seed outdoors? It is always best if you can. Seed stored in your home can become buggy and we don't want your house over run with moths.
- 2) If you can put it outside, make sure it is in a tightly sealed METAL can. Squirrels can smell it and they also watch you closely. They know where the seed is and will spend hours trying to get to it. They don't care how thick the plastic buckets are... they will eat right through them.
- 3) Keep the seed in the bag it is bought in if you can so that you actually use the old seed up before starting the new. If you empty into the can, really make sure you finish it off before emptying a new bag. We don't want old seed collecting at the bottom.
- 4) If you really can't store the seed outdoors, make sure it is in a cool spot in your home and only store a month's worth.

One other thought... don't store the seed on a screened in porch. The ever watchful squirrels will see where you are dishing it from and will come through the screen. (gotta love em)

We do sell the metal cans because we discovered they are difficult to find elsewhere. But, wherever you get one, just make sure the top is tight!

