

BBC
breathing
places



feed
a
bird

pocket guide



BBC Breathing Places is a major BBC Learning campaign to inspire and motivate you to create and care for nature-friendly green spaces where you live.

Getting out and enjoying nature can have great benefits for you and there are lots of exciting ways you can get involved.

Go wild with Breathing Places at bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces

Feathered facts

Garden birds are mainly woodland or woodland-edge birds that have discovered they can get everything they need in gardens.

More than 50% of UK adults – not to mention the thousands of children – now enjoy feeding birds.

Some birds, like the house sparrow and the magnificent, formation-flying starling, are not as common as they used to be. In fact, dramatic reductions in their numbers in certain parts of the country and general decline everywhere have raised concerns over their long-term future.

But the good news is that you can really make a difference by helping our feathered friends out with extra food. And it's not only the birds that will benefit because you'll get the chance to discover just how fascinating they really are. It's also a brilliant way to start teaching children about wildlife.

How do I feed birds?

Birds have different feeding habits. Some, like blackbirds, prefer to eat on tables, while others, like blue tits, prefer to eat at hanging feeders.

To help the broadest range of birds possible, why not provide both options? An ideal solution is a bird table with a reasonably sized flat area and feeders hung below. A dish of **fresh** water is also important because birds need to drink and bathe as well as eat.

Remember to place bird food out of the reach of predators, like cats.

It's also a good idea to clean feeders and water baths frequently. Wash them in a solution of one part bleach to 20 parts water and then let them air dry. Where possible, do this outside, wearing rubber gloves and using buckets and brushes kept for the purpose. And remember – always wash your hands afterwards.



Which food for which bird?

Seed mixes are great for house sparrows, finches, tits and blackbirds.

Sunflower and nyjer seeds are energy-filled food for adult birds. Nyjer requires a special feeder, but could attract goldfinches and siskins.

Peanuts from a feeder are rich in fat and popular with greenfinches, nuthatches and even great spotted woodpeckers.

Fat-based balls and bars are excellent, but should be removed from nylon mesh bags as the mesh can trap and injure birds.

Mealworms are relished by robins, blue tits and other insect-eating birds like pied wagtails.

DO NOT feed birds:

- ✘ **Milk** – birds cannot digest it.
- ✘ **Desiccated coconut** – may swell up inside the bird and cause death (split husks make great containers for other food though).
- ✘ **Salted nuts and spiced food.**
- ✘ **Mouldy and stale food** – some moulds cause respiratory infections in birds.

DIY bird treats

Although you can buy bird feeders and bird food, it is fun to make your own and there are lots of readily available materials, often within easy reach. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Winter bird cake

1. Pour melted fat (suet or lard) onto a mixture of ingredients, such as seeds, nuts, dried fruit, oatmeal, cheese and cake (use about one third fat and two thirds mixture). Don't use margarine or vegetable oils as they are unsuitable for birds.
2. Stir well before putting the mixture into a container of your choice, such as an empty coconut shell, plastic cup, yoghurt pot or tit bell. Leave until set.
3. Tie a piece of string to the container and hang it up on a tree or bird table.
4. Alternatively, turn the solidified mixture out onto a bird table.

Cheesy fir cone feeder

1. Take a large, open fir cone and some mild cheese (you could also add some seed mixture or crushed peanuts if you have any).
2. Pack the open cone with cheese and/or your filler.
3. Tie a piece of string to the top of the cone and hang it up.

Seedy apple

1. You'll need an apple and some seeds (sunflower seeds are a good choice).
2. Core the apple (but don't throw the core away).
3. Insert the seeds into the apple skin so it looks like a hedgehog (sunflower seeds are a good choice).
4. Slip a knotted piece of string through the apple's centre, replace the core (this will keep the string in place) and hang it up.

Now sit back and watch as the birds enjoy a hearty meal!

**Bird
food**

bingo



You know what they like to eat, but how many can you spot?



Collared dove – Smaller than woodpigeons, these seed- and grain-loving birds have a distinctive collar and a familiar and clear 'coo'.



Dunnock – Often seen on its own, creeping along the edge of a flower bed or near to a bush, this small bird enjoys tucking into insects, spiders, worms and seeds.



Seen



Seen



Goldfinch – Attractive bird, with a delightful, twittering song and long, fine beak, which allows it to extract hard-to-reach seeds from thistles and teasels.



Seen



Greenfinch – A popular and colourful garden visitor, with a passion for black sunflower seeds and a tendency to squabble with other birds over food.



Seen



Great tit – The UK's largest tit, this striking bird fills up on insects in the summer but takes in large numbers of seeds throughout autumn and winter.



Seen



Robin – Instantly recognisable, robins are aggressively territorial and quick to drive away intruders. They love singing next to street lights and eating mealworms.



Bingo!

Do One Thing

Fancy doing more? Here are some other simple ways you can help:

Drinks at the bar

In winter, many sources of water may be lost to birds when ponds and streams freeze. Pop a ping-pong ball into a shallow bowl or tray of water. The wind will move the ball around, helping to prevent the water from freezing.

Get planting

Organisations like Natural England and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) provide online advice to help you create a garden rich in plants which will create natural food sources for birds and other animals.

365 days

Although winter feeding benefits birds most, food shortages can occur at any time of the year. Feed birds all year round and you will be giving them a better chance to survive the periods of food shortage whenever they may occur.

Get creative

Encourage children's creativity by getting them to keep notes, do drawings and write stories about the birds that visit your garden. It could be the start of a lifelong passion for nature.

Buy wisely

Always buy bird food from a reliable source. For example, peanuts can sometimes be high in a natural toxin called aflatoxin which can prove fatal. A reputable dealer will guarantee their peanuts are safe.

Take part in a survey

Surveys are a great way to help identify trends in garden bird populations. Look out for The Big Garden Birdwatch and Big Schools Birdwatch which take place in January and February each year and are organised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) also runs bird-themed surveys.

For more details regarding these and other ideas, check out: bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces



**do
one
thing**

For more ideas of what you can
do for nature, why not check out
other Do One Thing activities at:

bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces

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