

Courtesy of Birds & Blooms Magazine

<http://birdsandblooms.com/birding/birding-basics/>

## 5 Ways to Create a Bird-Safe Backyard

Keep your feathered friends healthy with clean feeders, fresh birdseed and a natural yard.

*By Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman*

A lot of planning, time and money go into attracting and feeding your backyard birds. But making your space appealing to them with food and plants they love is only one part of the equation. You also need to ensure that birds stay safe while in your yard. With these tips, you are on your way to a bustling backyard full of feathered guests. Creating and maintaining a bird-safe yard requires a bit more work and dedication beyond simply putting up a feeder. But the peace of mind that comes with doing your part to keep birds safe is extremely rewarding.

### Clean Feeders Regularly

Cleaning bird feeders is certainly not the most glamorous part of attracting birds, but it's necessary to keep them healthy and avoid spreading diseases. Moldy seeds and accumulated bird droppings create a very unhealthy environment. It's best to clean your feeders once a month using a stiff brush and hot, soapy water. Consider cleaning them more often during times of peak feeding activity, such as the migration season. Allow each feeder to dry completely before filling and putting it back up.

When you're ready to choose and buy a new feeder, it's important to consider **how easy it will be for you to take apart and clean**. Because many birds feed on the ground, remember to keep the area under the feeders clean as well.

### Say No to Pesticides

Birding and gardening go hand-in-hand, and understanding how birds, bugs and plants benefit one another greatly enhances the rewards. As an active gardener, you probably have found bugs eating your plants and felt the urge to take action. But it's important to know that most pesticides are nondiscriminate killers that don't just eliminate specific bugs. **Pesticides kill important pollinators**, like honeybees and butterflies, as well as helpful insects like lady beetles.

Although many kinds of lawn fertilizers with weed killers are harmful to wildlife, you still should consider organic fertilizers. Building your soil with a strong combination of compost and organic fertilizers is critical. If you forgo all fertilizers, you can end up with poor plant growth, fewer bugs for birds to eat, and soil erosion as plants decline.

And reducing the overall use of harsh pesticides in yards is healthier for humans, too. A pesticide-free yard is the safest option for your favorite birds, other wildlife guests, pets and even you, too!

## Prevent Painful Windowstrikes

*Thud!* When you hear a bird crash into a window, a feeling of dread comes over you. Stand out in your backyard and look at the windows of your house from a bird's perspective, and it's easy to see why strikes are a major issue. Windows reflect the sky and fool birds into thinking they can fly right through.

Special tape, decals shaped like hawks, and [many other products designed to reduce window strikes](#) can be effective and worth trying. If you're experiencing bird strikes at windows near your feeders and decals aren't doing the trick, move the feeders to within 2 or 3 feet of the window. In such a short distance, birds can't build up any speed between the feeder and the window. Birds may still bump into the window occasionally, but they're far less likely to be injured.

## Keep Cats Happy Indoors

Cats are lovely and make wonderful companions. But if you love birds and feeding them, [it's best to keep your cats indoors](#). Studies prove the devastating impact that roaming house cats and feral cats have on birds and small mammals.

House cats are not native and also are not part of the natural ecosystem. Many people believe that a well-fed kitty wouldn't have any reason to hunt birds, but even cared-for cats have the instinct to go after birds. Feeders and roaming cats are a lethal combination. If you have an outdoor cat, or if many strays visit your yard, it may be best if you refrain from feeding the birds, for the birds' own safety. Or, you can create an outdoor enclosure or cat patio for your feline friend. They allow your kitty to be outdoors without being a threat to birds. Remember that, according to veterinarians, indoor cats live longer, healthier lives. So keeping them inside not only protects the birds, it's also better for the cats.

## Clean Feeders Regularly

Cleaning bird feeders is certainly not the most glamorous part of attracting birds, but it's necessary to keep them healthy and avoid spreading diseases. Moldy seeds and accumulated bird droppings create a very unhealthy environment. It's best to clean your feeders once a month using a stiff brush and hot, soapy water. Consider cleaning them more often during times of peak feeding activity, such as the migration season. Allow each feeder to dry completely before filling and putting it back up. When you're ready to choose and buy a new feeder, it's important to consider [how easy it will be for you to take apart and clean](#). Because many birds feed on the ground, remember to keep the area under the feeders clean as well.

## Say No to Pesticides

Birding and gardening go hand-in-hand, and understanding how birds, bugs and plants benefit one another greatly enhances the rewards. As an active gardener, you probably

have found bugs eating your plants and felt the urge to take action. But it's important to know that most pesticides are nondiscriminate killers that don't just eliminate specific bugs. **Pesticides kill important pollinators**, like honeybees and butterflies, as well as helpful insects like lady beetles. Although many kinds of lawn fertilizers with weed killers are harmful to wildlife, you still should consider organic fertilizers. Building your soil with a strong combination of compost and organic fertilizers is critical. If you forgo all fertilizers, you can end up with poor plant growth, fewer bugs for birds to eat, and soil erosion as plants decline. And reducing the overall use of harsh pesticides in yards is healthier for humans, too. A pesticide-free yard is the safest option for your favorite birds, other wildlife guests, pets and even you, too!

### Prevent Painful Window strikes

*Thud!* When you hear a bird crash into a window, a feeling of dread comes over you. Stand out in your backyard and look at the windows of your house from a bird's perspective, and it's easy to see why strikes are a major issue. Windows reflect the sky and fool birds into thinking they can fly right through. Special tape, decals shaped like hawks, and **many other products designed to reduce window strikes** can be effective and worth trying. If you're experiencing bird strikes at windows near your feeders and decals aren't doing the trick, move the feeders to within 2 or 3 feet of the window. In such a short distance, birds can't build up any speed between the feeder and the window. Birds may still bump into the window occasionally, but they're far less likely to be injured.

### Keep Cats Happy Indoors

Cats are lovely and make wonderful companions. But if you love birds and feeding them, **it's best to keep your cats indoors**. Studies prove the devastating impact that roaming house cats and feral cats have on birds and small mammals. House cats are not native and also are not part of the natural ecosystem. Many people believe that a well-fed kitty wouldn't have any reason to hunt birds, but even cared-for cats have the instinct to go after birds. Feeders and roaming cats are a lethal combination. If you have an outdoor cat, or if many strays visit your yard, it may be best if you refrain from feeding the birds, for the birds' own safety. Or, you can create an outdoor enclosure or cat patio for your feline friend. They allow your kitty to be outdoors without being a threat to birds. Remember that, according to veterinarians, indoor cats live longer, healthier lives. So keeping them inside not only protects the birds, it's also better for the cats.

### Avoid Red Dye

Beware: Some retailers offer hummingbird food colored with red dye. Most leading experts agree that the dye can be harmful to birds, and at the very least it's unnecessary. The top recommendation for hummingbird food is to make it at home. **Mix one part granulated white sugar to four parts water**. Any other kind of sweetener besides white granulated table sugar may be unsafe.