



HOME AND GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER

University of Maryland Extension

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Wildlife Tips

Occurrences

- Many birds molt in the fall, losing and replacing many feathers. Some birds change color and look different after molting. Male goldfinches are brilliant yellow and black in summer and olive brown in winter. They look much like the female. Juveniles resemble males in winter.
- If you notice large quantities of seed missing from your bird feeders, squirrels and raccoons may be the culprits. However, some bird species such as chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, some woodpeckers, and blue jays cache (store) food for later use. Blue jays often bury their seeds and nuts just like squirrels.
- You can actively watch the birds in your backyard with a purpose. Amateur and seasoned birders can participate in bird counts, surveys, and other online projects that track the distribution and abundance of birds. Have fun sharing your observations with scientists and other birders. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and other partners have developed projects such as “Project FeederWatch”, “eBird”, “Celebrate Urban Birds”, “Great Backyard Bird Count”, and more. Visit Cornell’s website for more information <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/birding123/report/>
- Some woodland species of butterflies such as the angle wings (Question Marks and Commas) overwinter as adults in MD. They look for tree hollows, exfoliating bark of trees, rock crevices, and log piles to hibernate. These butterflies take nutrients from rotting fruit, damp soil, and dung. They occasionally visit flowers for nectar.

Attracting

- When planning your wildlife friendly backyard don’t forget to include native trees and shrubs that produce fall and winter persistent fruits. The fruits are an important food source for migratory birds, winter residents, and other wildlife. The plants also offer nest sites and cover. Some fall fruiting trees and shrubs include: Dogwood, Persimmon, Black Gum, Oaks (acorns), and Eastern white pine (seed bearing cones).
- Some fall fruiting native trees and shrubs with winter persistent fruits include: Eastern red cedar, Sumac, American cranberry bush viburnum, Northern bayberry, American holly, and Winterberry holly (include male and female plants for cross-pollination). Fruits of these trees and shrubs may remain long after ripening and may not be eaten by birds until frozen

Educating People To Help Themselves

Local Governments - U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

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and thawed many times. These are important food sources for overwintering birds and early spring arrivals.

- Introduce native plants into your landscape by replacing dead or dying non-native plants with native species. You can also create new beds for plants in areas that are existing lawns.
- Rake some leaves into your ornamental beds. The leaves serve as mulch which break down into organic matter. The mulch slowly releases nutrients and offers weed control. A layer of leaf litter also provides a habitat for beetles, spiders, reptiles and other important predators in your landscape. Ground feeding birds feed upon the insects.
- Leave the large seedheads of black-eyed Susans, coneflowers, and native grasses for birds to feed on over the winter. Plants also offer shelter and provide winter interest in the garden.
- Clean all nest boxes and feeders. Scrape and remove debris and scrub with hot, soapy water. Rinse and let dry. Some birds that are cavity nesters such as (chickadees and titmice) may use the nest boxes for roosting during the winter.
- Don't put your bird bath away. Birds need fresh water for drinking and bathing throughout the fall season. Clean frequently and keep filled with fresh water.
- Use your fall trimmings to build a brush pile in the corner of your yard or near the edge of a wooded area. Brush piles offer winter protection for ground dwelling birds, small mammals, snakes and box turtles.
- You can supplement bird's natural diet with purchased seed, suet, etc. Winter through early spring are popular times to feed when natural food sources are less available. Birds can be fed year round. It is okay to stop feeding for short periods or permanently. Birds have evolved to adapt to different types of food sources. Black oil sunflower seeds and suet cakes are a good choice for a wide variety of birds. To attract your favorite species you have to provide the right combination of food and feeders. For information on feeding birds see <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/attracting/feeding/>

Nuisance

- Where deer are feeding on garden and landscape plants, you may need to use several approaches for control. Apply repellents such as "Liquid Fence", "Deer-Away", "Deer- Off", "Hinder", or "Ro-Pel" to vulnerable plants. Small deodorant soap bars, have been used with some success. If deer pressure is heavy, try rotating repellents. Grow plants seldom damaged by deer and consider fencing options.
- Where voles are a problem try using mouse snap traps baited with apples. Fall is a good time to trap. Voles accept the bait readily after the first hard frost when desirable foods are less plentiful. Reduce populations before the winter when woody plant damage is greatest.
- Store birdseed in metal cans with tight fitting lids to keep squirrels and mice at bay. These critters can chew through plastic lids.
- Fox are more prevalent now in suburban and urban areas. They are not very shy and become easily accustomed to humans. They are wild animals, however, and should not be approached or encouraged. Do not allow fox, skunks and raccoons access to edible trash, or dog, cat or bird food.
- House mice may be more noticeable around and in homes due to the onset of cool weather.

**Do you have a plant or insect pest question?
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