

Feed birds, not BEARS

Bird feeding can benefit birds and also provides great bird watching opportunities from your own backyard. The obvious time to feed birds is in winter when natural food supplies are scarce; however, additional species visit feeders during the spring and fall migrations, and also during summer while nesting.

To keep birds coming back to your feeders in any season provide them with the following three essential elements:

- ✓ Variety of quality seed.
- ✓ Fresh water for drinking and bathing.
- ✓ Ample cover, preferably provided by native plants. Native plants also provide potential nesting sites and a source of natural food.

Keep in mind bird feeders also present potential risks, such as window collisions, predation, and exposure to disease (like the spread of salmonella).

There's also no denying that bears are attracted to bird seed, as well as garbage, compost, fruit trees, berry bushes, barbecues, pet food and refrigerators/freezers stored outdoors. Nonetheless, bird feeders are a definite attractant in the plentiful "bear buffet" of our neighbourhoods. As a nature loving resident of bear country, we appreciate that you want to lessen your impact on the environment. Thanks for handling your garbage and outdoor food sources in a bear-friendly manner.

Ideally, you should avoid using any type of birdfeeder during bear season. As an alternative to hummingbird feeders, try planting red or pink native flowers which are known to appeal to hummingbirds. Bird baths are another great way to attract birds to your yard, without attracting bears.

Nevertheless, we do understand that you may want to attract birds to your yard with feeders, but don't want to condition bears to seek out bird seed in residential areas. The good news is - by making bird feeders inaccessible to bears and using the proper seed, bird lovers, like you, can attract birds without creating conflict with bears.

It is possible to make bird feeders inaccessible to bears. The basic principle of bear-proofing bird feeders is to hang the feeder beyond a black bear's reach. Sometimes the solution is to hang the feeder outside an upper story window, but please be aware that bears can scale rough sided walls. Remember to store bird seed securely indoors at all times.

Lawrence Ruskin, a bear smart resident, devised a very effective method for bear-proofing bird feeders that is being widely used in Lions Bay, B.C. The feeder is suspended from a wire spanning the distance between buildings and/or sturdy trees. The feeder is refilled using a stick with a hook or any long-reaching device.

HUMMINGBEAR Feeder



It's important to fill bird feeders with quality seed appropriate to local birds. Cheap wild bird mixes contain seed that many birds kick onto the ground. The fallen seed then attracts unwanted rodents and bears. Millet is useful to winter birds, but local summer birds prefer other varieties and a lot of millet ends up on the ground during bear season.

Here are some simple and easy instructions on how to bear-proof your bird feeder:

- Try using a tube type feeder with a large tray; a D.Y.A. or Droll Yankee feeder can be bought at any quality bird feed store. This type of feeder is the work horse of the feeder world and is easy to clean when you submerge it in a water/bleach solution. It is also the easiest to bear-proof. Get a 12" round plastic tray and screw it into the feeder bottom and a pigeon cage to keep out the wood pigeons, slow down the jays and allow the evening grosbeaks access to the feeder. The tray will keep most of your bird seed from being tossed onto the ground. Buy the best bird food available – the cheap stuff is such low quality that most of it gets wasted. Again, millet creates the most problems, as birds kick it to the ground and it then attracts rodents and bears.
- Keeping bears out of trees and off your deck is easy with the use of metal flashing. Use aluminum or stainless, so it won't rust. We recommend sheets that are a minimum of 1 m wide. You can usually purchase metal flashing from your local scrap yard and save some money. Wrap the flashing around the tree, from which you want to hang the bird feeder, such that you allow for expansion of the trunk girth as it grows. Bears will not be able to climb trees that are wrapped with smooth metal flashing as they simply can not get a grip on it. You can also use the metal flashing to deter bears from a second floor deck – simply wrap metal flashing on the support posts or any area which the bear would use to access the deck.
- You can also hang feeders from down rigger wire suspended from trees or your deck. We recommend that you purchase Scotty down rigger wire 150 lb test (#1002), 100 sleeves (#A4CPK), and one pack of small thimbles to strengthen the loops (this is a marine type thimble and is used to protect the wire from wear). For hooks, we suggest you use stainless swivels (#PTF - 127 - 1/0). These supplies will be sufficient to do three households, so you might choose to split the cost with a couple of neighbours. The advantage of thin down rigger wire is that bears cannot put enough pressure on the wire to break it without hurting their paws (and don't worry, they won't choose to hurt themselves just so they can hang from the wire). You can get this wire at any professional fisherman's supply store. To cut the wire, use the old type of tin snips [no spring]. To crimp the sleeves a pair of pliers with a side cutter will do.
- The height at which you hanging bird feeders is critical. Since most bears can't reach much beyond about 3 m, hang feeders at least 3.5 - 4 m from the ground. During winter, the feeder needs to be 3.5 – 4m above the height of the snow, just in case. A support line can be strung between a house and a tree, or house to house, or tree to



tree.

- Attaching it to the house: put a heavy-duty hook into a pre-drilled hole in the bargeboard or fascia under the eave of the house. Make sure to drill into the end of a rafter for added strength. Tip: rub hard soap into the threads so the hook will go in easily and all the way. This is the weak spot in the system, so be sure to do a good job.
- Attaching it to a tree: climb the selected tree from which you want to hang the wire or hire a tree service to do it for you. Insert the wire into a section of hose (long enough to go around the tree) so that it will not cut into the tree. Wrap the line (covered in hose) around the tree and double crimp it.
- The line around the tree should be level with the hook on your house. You can use a hand level to do this. Put a spike in the back of the tree to hold the line up - leave it sticking out so the bear can't roll the line down the tree.
- Run the line to the hook remembering to leave some slack so it doesn't get pulled down in high winds. Double crimp the line and use a thimble to keep it in place. Now that you have the support line, the rest is easy. Make a loop around the thimble and around the support wire and double crimp it. Put on the snap swivels and hang the feeder from that or simply hang it from the squirrel-proof dome.
- You can also hang your feeder from a tree branch. Make a loop in the wire, double crimp it, hang a weight (like a fishing weight) on the loop and throw it over the end of the branch (perhaps using a long stick). Put the cut end of the wire through the loop after you remove the weight and pull until you have lassoed the branch. Run the wire back to the tree and wrap it around the tree trunk. This creates a support line on which to slide feeders back and forth. A word of caution: bears can figure this system out and will try to break the branch to get at the bird feeder, so pick a sturdy branch or put metal flashing around the tree trunk.
- To ensure your system remains bear-proof, it's important to re-string and replace corroded parts every five years. The weakest points are the connections, especially at the tree end.
- Use a stick or long implement to retrieve and place your feeders out on the line.
- Go ahead and enjoy the birds in your yard while keeping bears wild and making your neighBEARhood safe for residents.



Based in part on information compiled by Norma Rodgers and Lawrence Ruskin, Lions Bay Bear Awareness, as well as information presented by Audubon.

For more information, contact the Get Bear Smart Society:

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