

Feeding the Birds

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If you have been providing sugar water for the hummingbirds you know that the ruby-throat hummingbird migrants have started to move through San Antonio. We can expect the rufous hummingbirds to appear soon. They are the smallest of our three regular fall hummingbirds but they are also the toughest, Expect them to win the dogfights for dominance of the sugar water feeder and any firebush or pentas that you have on the patio. In the landscape and gardens they will be using the zinnias, porter weed, salvias, lantana, and cape honeysuckle.

The migrating hummingbirds will be common through November so it is worthwhile to obtain a feeder and hang it from the eaves. Mix 5 parts water to 1 part sugar. Rinse it out with clean water and refill the feeder every week.

It is also a good time to start or resume feeding the seed-eating birds. If you only want to have one type of seeds, the oil sunflower is the best choice. It is the favorite of the cardinals, titmice, and chickadees. It is also the favorite of squirrels and white-winged doves. To limit their access obtain a steel feeder with weight sensitive perches. It shuts the feed access when a heavy bird or squirrel stands on the perch.

Another good choice for seed is safflower seed. Cardinals like safflower seed and it seems to be a favorite of house finches. They are the rosy breasted chickadee sized bird that is common in most neighborhoods. Squirrels don't like safflower seed.

Provide sunflower seed for the goldfinches as well. Distribute it in a tube feeder that has small slits for the access. The migrant American goldfinches don't look like "wild canaries" during the winter but the colorful lesser goldfinches will reward you by pulling seed from the feeder all year. Both of the goldfinch species are acrobatic and become quite tame.

You can meet the needs of the ground feeding seed eaters like Inca doves, Lincoln sparrows, and song sparrows by placing some mixed seeds on a low platform feeder every morning. It is desirable that the seed gets eaten by mid- afternoon so it isn't a regular supply for rodents at night. It is also best that mixed seed is not in an enclosed feeder because the birds have a tendency to pull out all the other seed until they find their favorite.

If you want to bring in the insect eaters for observation flavored suet blocks work really well. The beef fat flavored with fruit or seed attracts wrens, orange-crowned warblers, woodpeckers, kinglets, and starlings. Blue jays like the suet blocks and they will also eat sunflower seed.

The weather was cooler and we received some welcome rain last week but even in the winter we can expect dry spells. One of the best ways to support the bird population and bring large numbers of species in for observation is to offer a water source. A simple masonry bird bath works very well or you can make it fancier.

Birds are attracted to running water so adding a circulating pump or dripper will double the number of birds that frequent your bird bath

Place the bird bath in the open at least 6 feet from cover. If a shrub is 6 feet from the water it is close enough for a quick escape if a hawk flies over and it is far enough away that most cats cant launch a leaping attack. You don't have to worry about mosquitos or algae growth in you bath because between warm weather and splashing birds the usual bird bath will have to be refilled every day.