

# Setting up your Feeding Station

The Los Gatos Birdwatcher is here to help...

So, you have decided you would like to bring birds into your yard. You have come to the **Los Gatos Birdwatcher** to get some expert advice about quality seed and different types of feeders. First of all, thank you from us and from the birds. Inexpensive seed and feeders from non-specialists can cost more in the long run. Due to the limited number of birds who eat milo, a primary ingredient in the grocery/hardware store seed mixes, you will mainly get rock pigeons and house sparrows and there is more waste, more mess, and fewer birds. Cheap feeders break easily and are usually hard to clean.

## Placement

One thing to consider is where you are going to place your new feeder. Where do you watch the birds most from? Once you answer this, ask yourself these questions: Is there a tree to hang it from? Do I need a shepherd's hook? Will it be in the middle of the lawn? Can I hang it from the eave or from a deck railing? Is it within ten feet of shrub cover? What is the squirrel population?

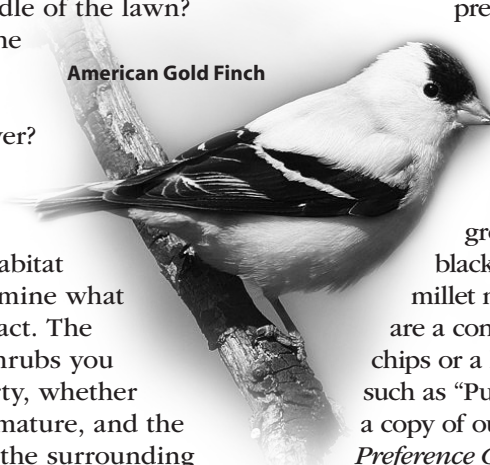
Keep in mind that habitat will ultimately determine what species you will attract. The kinds of trees and shrubs you have on your property, whether or not the trees are mature, and the quality of habitat in the surrounding

area will all determine what kinds of birds you'll be likely to see at your feeder. Ask for a copy of our *Gardening for Wildlife* Insiders Info sheet.

When you add a new feeder to your feeding station, be patient. Birds are creatures of habit and don't like change. Give them time to get used to it. Ideally, feeders should be within eight to ten feet from a landing spot where the birds can check out the situation. If the birds don't come to the new feeder within a week or so, consider moving the feeder, even if it's just one or two feet. The birds will let you know when it is the right place!

## Seed

Different seed served in different feeders attracts different birds. Some birds feed above ground in elevated feeders; others prefer to feed on the ground. Some birds like single seeds; others like a mix. A high sunflower content mix with millet, presented in a tube feeder, serves as an all-purpose mix, as the millet will be kicked out for the ground feeders. If you have more kick-out than ground feeders, switch to black oil sunflower or a non-millet mix. If debris or weeds are a concern, choose sunflower chips or a hulled "no mess" mix such as "Pure Patio Mix." Ask for a copy of our *Backyard Bird Seed Preference Chart*.

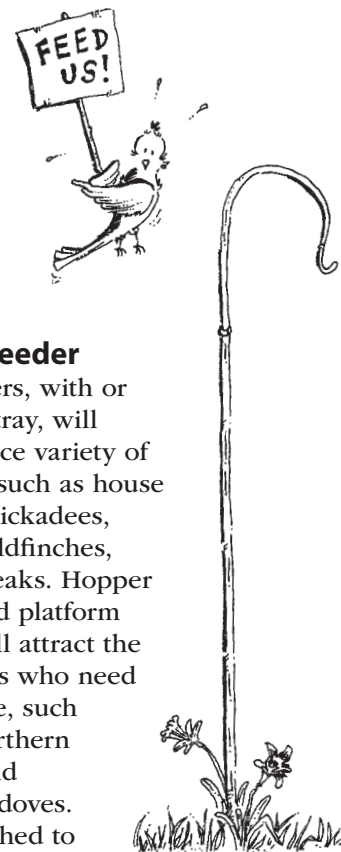


American Gold Finch

## Type of Feeder

Tube feeders, with or without a tray, will attract a nice variety of songbirds such as house finches, chickadees, titmice, goldfinches, and grosbeaks. Hopper feeders and platform feeders will attract the larger birds who need more space, such as jays, northern flickers, and mourning doves. Trays attached to tube feeders catch debris and allow the larger birds to feed but make it easier for squirrels to reach the feeder.

The addition of specialty feeders will increase the variety of birds visiting your feeding station and will also reduce the competition at the other feeders. Dedicating a special feeder of Nyjer/thistle for the goldfinches will mean more activity as goldfinches like their own space. Since Nyjer/thistle is a more expensive seed, this strategy will be more cost effective than serving it in a hopper or regular tube feeder. Suet, beef fat with various additional goodies like peanuts, mealworms, fruit, and nuts, is enjoyed by many birds. Suet feeders can be simple cages, cages with tail props for the woodpeckers or logs with holes. Peanut or nut feeders are usually an open mesh and are liked by



chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers and jays. Nectar feeders are attractive to both hummingbirds and orioles. Changing nectar frequently (every 3 days in summer, 5 days in winter) is important. If you add or change nectar feeder styles, add a 12" piece of red ribbon to the bottom of the feeder to more readily attract the hummingbirds. Ask for your complimentary ribbon.

## Water

Water is an important part of your feeding station in both summer and winter. It quenches thirst, cools, invigorates and very importantly, helps keep feathers clean and well groomed. Bathing during molting season, spring and early fall, is thought to ease skin discomfort associated with new feather growth. Water can be presented in a saucer on the ground, a pedestal bath, or a hanging bath. Keep the bath clean and fresh. Adding a dripper or "Water Wiggler" attracts the birds to the moving water. Misters are most attractive to hummingbirds and they will fly in and out of the spray. Place the bath within ten feet of a shrub or tree and far enough away from feeders so that shell debris will not fall into it. It is important that the bath is near enough to cover so that the birds have a safe place to preen after their bath.

Cleaning the bath regularly is important for the birds as well as for keeping mosquito larvae from growing. If algae grows, clean the bath with "Superbac" bird bath cleaner or white vinegar and add a few drops of "Fountec" to keep it algae free.

## Cleaning

Because clean feeders are healthier for the birds, **Los Gatos Birdwatcher** cleans feeders on Mondays and Thursdays. We ask that you make a donation to one of our four charities for this service. If you would like to clean your feeders yourself, we carry brushes and cleaning products to make the job easier. We also recommend "Micor Lift Cleaner," or white vinegar in lieu of bleach solutions. If you notice moldy seed at the bottom or a build up of seed debris and droppings in your platform feeder, knock the seed out, take apart the feeder as best you can and clean with the

solutions above with a brush. To prevent moldy buildup, only fill the feeders half as full in the winter rainy season and twice as often so the seed is fresher for the birds. Never add dry seed on top of wet. "Feeder Fresh" is a product that can be added to a tube feeder at the top and bottom to absorb the moisture. It is not harmful to the birds.

## When should you fill your feeder?

There are several schools of thought on this question. Some people fill it up as soon as it's empty. Others wait a few days for the birds to clean up what they've knocked on the ground. Still others feed once a week on a regular schedule. Don't worry that leaving your feeders empty will cause your birds to go hungry. Birds have many different food sources that they check on regularly.

## Keeping rain off the feeder

Hanging the feeder under the eave helps. Hanging a rain guard or squirrel baffle over the feeder will take care of some of the downpour, but will do little against the wind-driven rain. Change the seed regularly for best results.

## Storing seed

Summer time means seed moths. The best thing to do is to store the seed in a metal container, such as our six or ten gallon galvanized cans with locking handle, outside or in the garage. Rodents and squirrels can chew through plastic tubs. Keeping the seed inside the house increases the likelihood of a moth infestation. "Pantry Pest" traps work well to prevent a moth infestation. Buying smaller quantities during the summer months also will cut down on the possibility of infestation.

## Why feed the birds year round?

When you feed birds, you help more baby birds survive. More birds will eat more insects, so you'll need fewer chemicals to control them. Using fewer chemicals make the environment healthier for you, your children, your pets, our water supply and wild birds.

In the winter, natural food is more sparse, so food in feeders becomes a higher percentage of their total intake. In spring and summer, feeders give the parents a fast food restaurant to keep their energy up while feeding the babies. The babies get a healthy head start, especially neotropical migrants such as grosbeaks and orioles.

## Window strikes and cats

One of the hardest things to watch is a bird suffer and die after hitting a window. There are several ways to prevent this occurrence. Window feeders attract the birds to the feeder, not the window. Putting the feeders at least 10 feet away from the window give birds maneuvering room. Using "Window Alert" ultra-violet treated decals on the outside of windows warns birds of a barrier.

Millions of songbirds are killed by outdoor cats every year. Millions of cats are killed by cars, other cats, or wildlife every year. It is a proven fact that indoor cats live longer. Window feeders or feeders that can be viewed from inside, can provide hours of entertainment for the cats and safe feeding for the birds. If there are neighborhood cats that are not under your control, there are several ways of deterring them from catching your birds. If the feeder is hanging from a tree or shepherd's hook, try putting one of two concentric circles of flexible garden edging at 3 and 4 foot diameters under the feeder. The cat has to go up and over and that will give the birds enough time to fly to safety. If cats are hiding under the shrubbery, trim it up so the birds can see under. Put rose bush clippings or commercial "pigeon poker deterrent" under the shrubs.

If the bird survives the impact with the window but does not fly off within one half hour or if it has been caught by a cat and not killed, the bird needs medical attention. There are two local wildlife rehabilitation groups: Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley in San Jose (408/929-9453) and Wildlife Education and Rehabilitation Center in Morgan Hill. (409/779-9372.) Place the bird in a ventilated box with a non-terry cloth towel in a warm, dark and quiet place. Do not feed or water. Transport as soon as possible.

