

Fall Tips for Your Birds

WHAT FALL MEANS TO THE BIRDS

(From Songbirds in your Garden by John K. Terres)

In fall, food and cover gradually decline. Berries are eaten up by birds or fall to the ground. Leaves fall and the range of shelter for birds shrinks. Insects die from frosts or hibernate in the ground and in other places inaccessible to many birds.

Weather gets colder and the days get shorter, which means that birds have less time to hunt for food than during the long summer days. Here is what birds especially need in fall:

- Food: They look for the fleshy fruits and seeds that persist on plants above the snows of early winter. This is a good time to plant many kinds of trees, shrubs, and vines.
- Shelter: Pines, spruces, and other evergreens become increasingly important to birds, for shelter against the cold and storms of early winter. Bird nesting boxes and roosting boxes will help. Fall is the best time to put them up because the bird nesting boxes, if weathered, may be more acceptable to birds the next spring.
- Water: Keep birdbaths thawed and fill them with fresh water daily.

FALL MIGRATION

Watch for the changes that fall brings to the bird population in your garden.

- By mid October the White-throated sparrow will have settled in, and our cheerful catbirds will depart until next spring.
- Watch the weather report. Birds like to fly ahead of cold fronts because they can take advantage of the tailwind to make their journey faster and easier. When the cold fronts come through, chances are that your yard will be teeming with birds the following day.
- Keep an eye on the sky. Remember to look up. Although many migrating birds won't land in your yard, you may spot some exciting birds in flight.
- Keep an eye on any berries or fruits in your yard. They're the perfect foods for birds passing through.



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- Watch for changes in plumage—male goldfinches lose their brilliant color and switch to winter drab, and “stars” will appear on the tips of starlings’ feathers.
- Keep your hummingbird feeders up until freezing temperatures threaten; more than one late migrant has been saved by a forgotten feeder.
- You may see a lot of activity at your feeder as cold weather approaches. Now’s the time to clean your feeders and stock up on birdseed.
- Fresh water is always important. Don’t forget to keep the birdbath full.

GARDEN MAKEOVER

You can make your yard a haven for wildlife, too. Visit the Audubon website (<http://magazine.audubon.org>) for articles and advice on everything from butterfly gardens to bird feeders to ponds.

These tips are the recommendations of Scott Shalaway. To learn more, consult *A Guide to Bird Homes and Building a Backyard Bird Habitat* by Dr. Shalaway.