

Mecklenburg Audubon Society

Backyard Notes: Feeder Hygiene

Clean and disinfect your bird feeder whenever you refill it, ideally once a week. Liquid chlorine household bleach makes a perfect, dilute disinfectant by mixing one part bleach with nine parts water, which gives a 10% solution. After a good scrub with soap the bird feeder needs to be rinsed or even better soaked for 10 minutes in this solution.

If the feeder is too large to be submerged, fill your disinfectant solution into a spray bottle and spray it well without overlooking hidden corners. The solution needs to be made up fresh each time because it loses its strength after 24 hours. Then rinse your bird feeder and let it dry thoroughly, especially wooden structures.

Finally, replenish the container with the seeds of your choice according to the species you want to attract. If the feeders are plastic and can be disassembled put it in the dishwasher. Air dry the feeder.

Store food in an animal and water proof containers in a cool area. Discard any food that smells musty, is wet, looks moldy or has fungus growing on it. Contaminated storage containers and scoops that held spoiled food need to be cleaned as well.

Birds are messy eaters but it is our responsibility to clean the feeder area of wasted food and droppings, which make a perfect place for infections to breed. If the ground beneath your feeder is smooth, a broom and shovel will do the job otherwise. A heavy-duty outdoor vacuum cleaner would be very helpful. After sweeping or vacuuming, hose down the area generously. If you can without causing local damage to plants or house, apply the rest of your 10% bleach solution and disinfect the area.

Nectar feeders should be thoroughly cleaned and bleached once a week and refilled on a regular base. In the summer when it is very hot they should be cleaned daily. Birdbath areas with standing water need to be bleached weekly and should be emptied and refilled with fresh water on a daily basis. Allow ample space between the birdbath and the feeder area.

(Adapted from Wild Bird Center website by Astrid Kasper DVM.)



10 Ways to Beat Salmonella

Salmonella is the bird feeder's biggest enemy. Here are 10 simple tips for preventing salmonella outbreaks in your backyard bird feeders.

1. Clean and disinfect bird feeders every two weeks. If you keep a lot different types of feeders, break them up into lots, cleaning a few at a time.
2. Use small feeders that come apart quickly & fit in your kitchen sink easily.
3. Wash. Bleach. Rinse. Rinse. Rinse. And dry. Take your feeders apart and wash them thoroughly using a brush to get into the grimy little corners. Soak them in a 10% bleach solution for 20 minutes. Rinse them thoroughly three times. Allow the parts to dry completely. Reassemble and fill them only once they are bone dry.
4. Buy low-cost feeders made of recyclable materials and replace them frequently. Until someone invents a bird feeder made entirely of organic, biodegradable materials, this is the best you can do.
5. Between cleanings, spray all surface areas on problem feeders with pure alcohol. It evaporates quickly and kills surface bacteria.
6. Wash, bleach, rinse, rinse, rinse and dry your bird bath at least once a month. If you use a birdbath heater, be sure to clean it thoroughly too.
7. Resist filling your feeders to the top. Unless you have an extraordinarily busy yard, there is no need to fill your feeders more than 1/4 full. Your busiest feeders may have to be filled to the top, but the rest do not.
8. Avoid wooden feeders or feeders with wooden parts. Salmonella is very difficult to get out of wood.
9. If you are trying to achieve a decorative effect, use small, one-piece stainless steel feeders. Those that fit in your kitchen sink are easiest to clean.
10. Bake your seed in the oven at 250 degrees (Fahrenheit) for one hour before putting it into your bird feeders. This kills any bacteria already in the seed and, as an added benefit, prevents it from germinating.

Bonus Tip

11. If you are too busy to clean your feeders regularly, then don't feed the birds. Dirty feeders kill birds.

By Brent Johner, Talk About Wildlife:
http://weaselhead.org/articles/bird_feeder_cleaning_tips.php