



## Okay to Resume Feeding Birds

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

In case you haven't heard, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) lifted its birdfeeder and birdbath advisory recently. Residents had been advised to stop feeding the birds in response to an unknown but potentially infectious condition that had been responsible for bird deaths in the Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C. area.

Several dead birds with similar symptoms were found in Connecticut early this summer. Symptoms included swollen or cloudy eyes with a crusty discharge. The purpose of halting the filling of bird feeders and baths was to limit areas where birds would congregate in hopes of limiting the spread of this unknown disease.

While the number of sick or dead birds has dropped considerably (hence the lifting of the ban), citizens finding dead birds should file a report with the CT Wild Bird Mortality database ([www.cfwwildbirdmortalityreporting.ct.gov/](http://www.cfwwildbirdmortalityreporting.ct.gov/)). Use gloves when handling dead birds and either bury them deeply on your property or double bag them and place in trash receptacle. If injured or sick birds are found, contact a local licensed wildlife rehabilitator. There is a list on the CT DEEP's website. Keep pets away from dead or sick birds.

Feeding the birds is a popular past time with 65 million Americans participating in this activity. It's great that we can resume our routine, but we might want to pay more attention to selecting and maintaining feeders and bird baths. For feeders, pick a location that is convenient for you but not near bushes where cats and other predators can hide. Also, since bird collisions with windows kill about 1 million birds each year, either set your feeder up within 3 feet of a window or a good 10 feet away. Birds appreciate a nearby tree or large shrub they can fly to for safety.

Try to keep birdseed off of the ground where it can get damp and moldy and mix with bird droppings. A slightly raised platform feeder is good for ground feeders such as mourning doves, juncos, and turkeys.

There are many different hanging feeders to choose from made from many materials including wood, plastic, ceramic, cloth, and metal. Select one that has drainage holes and looks like it would be easy to clean. Consider purchasing 2 feeders for each location so one can be scrubbed clean and allowed to dry each week while the other can be in use. Look for durable models that can withstand the tests of time, weather and perhaps intrusions by squirrels.



Wooden bird feeder. Photo by dmp2019.

Do your best to choose feeders that will keep the seed dry. Tube feeders with smaller openings keep much moisture out but the seed may get wet during heavy rain or snow storms. Sometimes plastic domes can be purchased to set over certain types of feeders and these not only help keep precipitation out and also deter squirrels.

Wash feeders in hot soapy water with a couple capfuls of bleach tossed in. Let them air dry before reusing. Bird baths can also be scrubbed once a week with the same mixture. Rinse well before refilling. Set aside a scrub brush or two for bird baths and feeders.

The type of seed that feeders are filled with determines what species of birds will be most likely to visit your station. Black sunflower seeds are probably the most preferred seed by a large number of bird species. Safflower seeds will draw cardinals, white throated sparrows and doves while peanuts are favored by tufted titmice, white throated sparrows, jays, and of course, squirrels. Thistle seeds are sought after by finches, including gold finches, some sparrow species as well as pine siskins. White proso millet draws mourning doves, sparrows and other ground feeders and is good to use with platform feeders. Suet brings in plenty of woodpeckers, nuthatches as well as many others.

If you want to attract a variety of birds, consider putting out separate feeders for each type of seed. Although one can buy bags of 'wild bird food' that contain a mixture of seeds, do keep in mind that many of the filler seeds – milo, corn, red millet, oats and canary seed – just get dumped on the ground as birds are searching for their favorites.

Be a conscientious bird feeder this year. Take a good look at your present feeders and seed selection and maybe change things up to ensure feeders are routinely clean and serve the type of seeds for the birds you are most interested in attracting.

Check out CT DEEP's and Audubon's websites for more information on bird disease, feeders and seed selection. For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu), or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.