

# Backyard Birds: Which Bird Food to use?

There are many different bird foods to choose from, and each one attracts different types of birds. This is a list of the common types of bird food available and what Utah species they attract:

**Black oil sunflower seeds:** The most widely used type of bird seed, you can find this on its own or in many seed mixes. Black oil Sunflower seed attracts many different birds including woodpeckers, grosbeaks, finches, sparrows, jays, chickadees, doves, quail, nuthatches, and blackbirds.

**Striped sunflower seeds:** The larger cousin of the black oil sunflower seed, this is the type seen as a snack for humans, the main difference is the bird food version is not flavored (make sure to avoid seeds meant for human consumption as the extra flavorings can make birds sick). Since they are bigger, they usually attract larger species like jays, blackbirds, grosbeaks, doves, and woodpeckers.

**Safflower seeds:** These large white seeds are popular in the Eastern US as they attract many large, colorful bird species and are not raided by squirrels and chipmunks. Only a few species will eat safflower like chickadees, woodpeckers, grosbeaks, doves, and nuthatches

**Nyjer seed:** Also known as thistle (although it is not in the thistle family), these small seeds are imported from Africa and are a favorite of goldfinches and doves.

**Millet:** These small seeds are often overlooked in seed mixes over sunflower seeds and nuts, but they are favored by ground-dwelling species like sparrows, quail, and doves, and brightly colored Lazuli Buntings.

**Corn:** Dried corn, either in pieces or on a cob, is a favorite of quail, doves, chickadees, and jays.

**Peanuts:** Either in the shell, halved, or in pieces (but always unsalted), peanuts provide great food year-round for woodpeckers, chickadees, jays, and nuthatches.

**Fruit:** You can use many types of fruit to attract fruit-eating birds like grosbeaks, tanagers, orioles, finches, and thrushes. Berries (raspberries, blueberries, blackberries), cut grapes, apples, and oranges are best, and you can cut them into slices or smaller pieces for birds to eat more easily. Unlike seeds, fruit need to be changed out every few days so they don't spoil.

**Suet:** Often seen in square bricks, suet is rendered beef fat often mixed with other bird food such as berries, seeds, or peanut butter. Suet is eaten by many usual backyard birds such as woodpeckers, sparrows, finches, blackbirds, nuthatches, and jays, but it will also attract other species that don't eat seeds such as orioles, warblers, starlings, kinglets, and tanagers.

**Hummingbird nectar:** Eaten by both hummingbirds and orioles, nectar is normally produced by flowers but can be found in powder form, concentrates, or ready to use varieties in stores. You can even make your own by using one-part white sugar to four-parts water. Be careful not to get any nectar products with artificial dyes as the dyes can hurt birds.

**Water:** Having a bird bath or other water feature is an excellent bird magnet for your yard, especially in a desert state like Utah. Many bird species will come for a bath or a drink, even species that may not normally eat at your feeders.