

Winterizing Your Backyard

The trees have dropped their leaves and the green lawns have faded. The woodlands and wetlands, once teeming with life, appear silent. But beneath winter's frigid exterior, animals have adapted to the seasonal changes in temperature and light. To many creatures, the return of winter means it's time for a long slumber; to others it indicates it's time to travel to warmer climates; to still others it means a bitter struggle for survival; while to many insect species it signifies the completion of their life cycle. There are many ways in which you can help wildlife survive our Northeastern winters.

The best way to provide winter food for wildlife is by planting native vegetation that produces berries, nuts, or seeds such as highbush cranberry, sumac, and winterberry holly. Bird feeders become crucial for wildlife in the winter when their natural food sources are scarce. Place feeders where they will be protected from the wind and fill them with high-calorie foods like black-oil sunflower seed and suet. Remember to keep feeders clean to protect birds from the spread of disease caused by moldy seed or seed contaminated by droppings.

It is also vital to provide places where wildlife can find protection from predators and cold weather, especially in new suburban developments where the land has been cleared of vegetation. Planting native evergreens, such as cedar, fir, spruce and hemlock can provide valuable cover. By collecting yard debris like branches, twigs and fallen leaves, you can create cover for birds and small mammals, and offer a hibernation place for some species of turtles, salamanders and insects. Since most sources of water are frozen during the winter it is imperative to birds and other creatures to keep your bird baths clean and free from ice.

Here are some simple ways you can beautify your yard while providing wildlife with energy rich-food. For these ideas and more go to www.backstage.nwf.org.

1. You can decorate trees in your yard with garland made of popped popcorn, raw peanuts (with the shell), cranberries, grapes, apples, etc.. You can make ornaments by stuffing pine cones with suet and peanut butter covered with bird seed. You can buy seed cakes shaped like bells at local feed stores.
2. You can make suet muffins: Mix 1 cup chunky peanut butter, with 1 cup suet. Add 2¹/₂ cups coarse yellow corn meal to thicken. Stir in seeds, raisins and/or roasted peanuts. Place mixture in muffin tin, sprinkle with seeds, place a pipe cleaner in each to act as a hanger and place in freezer. Once hardened, hang muffins outside or place in a feeding station.
3. You can make suet cakes: Combine 1 part melted suet, vegetable shortening, or lard with 3 parts corn meal, 1 part flour, and about 2 parts bird seed, peanuts, raisin, etc. Press mixture into any kind of mold and chill in refrigerator. Once hardened hang cakes from trees with string or ribbon.
4. You can make wreaths: Use millet stalks or wire to form the wreath and decorate with popcorn, cranberries, fruits, pinecone feeders, etc.

5. Friendly Snowman: Make a snowman who holds flowerpots full of treats in their arms.

Have a great holiday and as always if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call, 978-649-2300 ext. 116 ~Lori Capone, Conservation Agent