

Winter Birds

Give Birds an Extra Boost With Winter Suet Recipes

Simple Suet Recipe

- 1 cup lard
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 2 ½ cups oats
- 2 ½ cups cornmeal

Melt lard and peanut butter over low heat. Stir in oats and cornmeal. Add bird seed or nuts if desired. Pour the mixture into a pan and chill overnight in the fridge. Cut into squares and wrap in plastic for easier storage and removal.

This interesting article is written by Melissa Mayntz, a Birding/Wild Bird Expert from Utah.

Suet is one of the best winter bird foods backyard birders can offer because it is high in fat and calories to give birds the energy to survive low temperatures and severe weather. Cakes, balls and logs of suet are a favorite food of many winter backyard species, including jays, woodpeckers, chickadees, tits and nuthatches, and because it stays fresher in cold weather, suet can easily be offered in multiple feeders to accommodate different birds' preferences and feeding styles. But suet in the winter is slightly different than suet that might be offered to birds at other times of the year, and understanding birds' winter needs can help backyard birders choose or make the right suet blend for a nutritional winter feast.

Making Winter Suet

It is easy to render beef fat or other fat sources with a simple bird suet recipe for fast winter treats, but it is equally easy to customize a suet recipe so it is even more appealing to specific backyard birds.

Backyard birders can begin to stockpile a supply of suet for winter in late summer or early fall, freezing the suet until it is needed, or it can be made in smaller batches and offered fresh to birds as soon as it is firm enough to place in feeders.

Best Ingredients for Winter Suet

Whether the suet is homemade or purchased from bird supply stores or other suet suppliers, the best winter suet will have high fat ingredients to satisfy birds' cold weather energy needs. The best ingredients for winter blends include:

- **Fat:** Beef fat or lard is the most common fat source in suet, though other types of animal fat or vegetable shortening may also be used. In homemade suet, however, bacon drippings or pork fat should be minimized, as it is not as nutritionally sound for birds.

- **Softener:** While firm suet is easiest to feed the birds, a mild softener makes it more crumbly than sticky, making it easier for birds to pull apart without leaving residue on their bills or feathers. Whole wheat or all purpose flour, corn meal and quick oats are easy options for this type of ingredient.
- **Flavorings:** While birds do not have a strong sense of taste, adding different ingredients to winter suet will help make it more appealing to a wider range of species. Smooth or chunky peanut butter, nut pieces, sunflower seeds, mealworms, raisins and millet are popular options that winter birds will appreciate.

While any ingredients can be mixed with suet to tempt birds, it is best to minimize bits of fruit in winter blends, as most frugivorous birds have migrated and the fruit pieces will not appeal to as many winter birds. Less expensive fillers such as wheat or cracked corn should also be left out of suet – these grains appeal more to ground-feeding birds, not species that will cling to suet feeders, particularly in winter.

Creating Your Own Recipe

There are dozens of suet recipes available online, but it is just as easy to create your own customized blend specifically for the tastes and preferences of your backyard flock. Experimenting with different blends can yield a variety of results, but the birds will appreciate nearly all of them – backyard birds are not picky when winter food sources are scarce. It is best to work in small batches at first to find the best blends without excessive waste, but take careful notes of different ingredients and preparation methods, as well as which birds prefer which results, to be able to replicate the best recipes over and over again.

Tips for Feeding Suet in the Winter

When offering birds suet in winter...

- Use covered feeders or place the suet in sheltered areas so it does not become covered in snow or ice, especially during stormy days.
- Break suet into smaller pieces or shred it for easier feeding in severely freezing temperatures, offering those smaller bits in trays or dishes.
- Smear softer suet directly on tree trunks for easy access by climbing birds such as creepers, nuthatches and woodpeckers.
- Take steps to discourage mice and other bird feeder pests that may take advantage of a free meal, as well as controlling bully birds.
- Increase the amount of suet offered in midwinter when temperatures are coldest and autumn food sources or birds' caches may be exhausted.

Suet is an ideal food for all winter birds, and adjust the type of suet offered during winter can help better meet birds' nutritional needs and ensure they have a healthy, stable food supply even in the coldest temperatures and harshest weather.