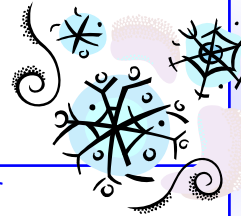


Winter 2011

The Four Seasons

Hardin County Extension Service Horticulture Newsletter



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Feeding Birds in the Winter

You'll have good company if you maintain a bird feeder this winter. A government survey found that more than 60 million Americans share your enthusiasm for feeding birds.

Anyone who has ever fed wild birds a commercially packaged birdseed mixture soon observes that birds eat some seeds faster than others. But until recently, very little scientific information was available on seed preference to help you in selecting the types of seed most desired by the birds in your neighborhood.



Some seeds are prized by many birds, some are ignored by most, and others can be used to selectively attract certain birds or discourage them from using the feeder.

You can use this table (on page 3) to help mix your own bird

seed. Generally, your best results will be obtained by mixing black sunflower seed and white proso millet. This mixture will attract the most birds to your feeder and none of your money will be spent on unattractive seed.

Many people, however, wish to discourage house (English) sparrow use. By shifting from white proso millet to red, you will discourage house sparrows from coming to your feeder a lot more than you will the other more desirable bird species.

Birds also differ in how they feed. Some prefer to feed from elevated feeders while others

prefer the ground.

In general, the birds that prefer black sunflower are attracted to elevated feeders, while those preferring white proso millet like to feed on the ground.

Tubular feeders generally should not be filled with millet-sized seed because these type seeds are preferred by ground feeding birds.

Niger thistle seed, which is primarily attractive to gold-finches, house finches and pine siskins, is dispensed best in specially designed feeders. Lastly, remember that feeders need periodic cleaning to work properly.

Not all birds are attracted to seed in the winter. Mesh bags of suet are choice foods for woodpeckers, nuthatches and brown creepers.

Winter feeding can be a rewarding experience and offers the best opportunity to observe birds up close. With some understanding of bird-food preferences, you can maximize your results.



Inside this issue:

Perennial Plant of the Year	2
Which Seed for Which Bird	2
Last Year's Seed	3
To the Next 15 Years	3
What to Do in January and	4
Gardener's Toolbox Classes	5

Perennial Plant of the Year: *Amsonia hubrichtii*

Amsonia hubrichtii grows 36 inches tall and 36 inches wide in a mounded form. This hardy perennial grows in hardiness zones 4 through 9 and is a versatile North American native.

Amsonia offers a variety of features throughout the seasons. From late spring to early summer, two- to three-inch wide clusters of small, light blue, star-shaped flowers are borne above the ferny foliage. The alternate-arranged leaves are bright green in spring and summer, but turn a bright yellow-golden color in fall.

- Light - Plants thrive in full sun to partial shade
- Soil - This plant performs best in average, moist well-drained soil but tolerates less moisture. Once established, it can tolerate drier conditions.
- Uses - This perennial for the seasons is an asset in borders, native gardens, cottage gardens, or open woodland areas. It is best when massed. Arkansas blue star is attractive when mixed with ornamental grasses and plants that have attractive seed heads.

- Unique Qualities - Light blue flowers in spring are followed by marvelous foliage in summer. Golden-yellow fall color is second to none among herbaceous perennials.
- Hardiness - USDA Zones 4 to 9



Which Seed Type Attracts Which Birds?

Bird Species	Bird Seed														
	Black Sun-flower	Striped Sun-flower	Hulled Sun-flower	Niger Thistle	Whole Peanuts	Peanut Hearts	German Millet	White Proso Millet	Red Proso Millet	Canary	Milo	Cracked Corn	Wheat	Rape	Saf-flower
Bluejay	1*	6	1	0	10	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Cardinal	10	9	3	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Evening gros-beak	10	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common grackle	5	10	9	0	4	3	0	1	1	1	1	5	1	0	0
Chickadees	10	4	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goldfinch	4	1	10	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
House finch	9	4	10	4	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Purple finch	10	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Tufted titmouse	2	4	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cowbird	1	1	1	0	0	0	4	10	7	3	1	1	0	0	0
House sparrow	2	2	2	0	2	1	5	10	4	5	1	2	2	0	0
White-throated sparrow	6	7	9	1	10	4	5	8	6	4	2	5	1	0	2
Mourning dove	9	4	4	2	1	1	8	10	9	6	4	3	2	1	2

*10 = most attractive, 0 = least attractive

Can You Use Last Year's Seed?

The avid gardener among us knows that seed catalogues are starting to show up in the mailbox. Hardware stores and garden centers have their seed displays in full view. If you are like me, your eyes are much bigger than your garden, and there were many seeds still in the cupboard from last season's purchases. Can you use these seeds this season? Is there a good chance they will germinate if planted?

Most vegetable seeds remain viable or able to germinate for three years or more when stored properly. A few vegetables such as spinach, onion, and sweet corn, produce seeds that remain viable for a shorter period of time. These would probably be best purchased fresh each year or at least every second year. However, most vegetable seeds can be stored for several years and still exhibit high rates of germination, but storage conditions are very important.

If you are keeping seeds from one year to another try to keep them as dry as possible. Enclosing them in a glass jar, plastic food storage box, or other airtight container is best. This will keep the seeds dry and will also protect against insect infestation and feeding by rodents. Check the seeds periodically to make sure there is no mold.



Discard any damaged or decaying seed. Although refrigeration is not necessary, keeping seeds as cool as possible, but not freezing, will also

prolong their life.

If seeds have been kept for a year or more, check their germination using a procedure called the rag doll test. Wrap 10 seeds of each seed packet in a moist paper towel. The paper towel should only be moist, not dripping wet. Roll or fold the towel to enclose the seeds and stuff the seed-containing towels into a zip lock bag and seal. You will need to label each towel if more than one is placed in a bag. Label with a pencil or waterproof marker prior to wetting the towel or enclose a label with the seeds. Place the seeds in a warm area where the temperature will remain between 70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Most seeds that are going to germinate should do so in a week or two. If 75% or more of the seeds germinated, plant the seeds as you normally would in your garden. If germination is around 50%, it is still fine to use the seeds, but you may want to plant the seeds twice as thick as your normally would to make up for the lower germination rate. If germination is low, say 30% or less, it would probably be best to purchase fresh seeds.



When you purchase seeds, be sure to read the label and buy only seeds packaged for the current growing season. This will ensure that you are getting the freshest seeds available.

To the Next 15 Years...

Welcome to the end of 2010! Wow. I can't believe it's already the end of the year. This also is the middle of my 15th year here in Hardin County as your Horticulture Agent! In all those years, I hope I have helped you out with gardening questions, classes and gardening activities.

As the season for growing has slowed down, I have the time to think and plan. In this newsletter, I have included some of the "best of" articles, some new information and a great selection of classes.

If you would like a specific class or any questions to cover in this publication, please let me

know by calling: 270.765.4121; email: Amy.Aldenderfer@uky.edu; or visit our website: www.hardinhort.org.

Happy Gardening,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy Aldenderfer'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Amy Aldenderfer
County Extension Agent for Horticulture

What to Do in January and February

With the ground covered in snow, I know that you think there's nothing to do in the garden. But here's a short list of chores that can and should be done during the winter rest.

- * Order seed catalogs. Then browse profusely, making many wish lists.



- * Take steps to prevent fruit trees and landscape ornamentals against rabbits and mice. Use cylinders of 1/4" hardware cloth to keep the rodents from girdling plants by eating the bark. Be sure the guards extend well above the usual snow level.

- * Prevent bark splitting in young fruit trees and other tender-barked trees by wrapping the trunks loosely with window screening. Secure the window screening to itself with a stapler. The screening should be loose around the trunk. The aim is to keep the trunk from heating up on bright, sunny winter days. The bark tends to split as it cools rapidly after the winter sun has warmed the south and west sides.

- * Clean up fallen fruits, dead plant materials and other debris, especially in the vegetable garden and rose beds. These materials may harbor insects and disease organisms. Removing them now may reduce the potential for problems next year.



- * Mulch strawberries, roses, and perennials with straw, chopped leaves or other materials after the ground is frozen to about 3 inches.

- * Store leftover garden chemicals in a cool, dry place where they won't freeze or be exposed to high temperatures. Make sure the storage area can be locked so children, pets, wildlife and irresponsible adults cannot get into it.

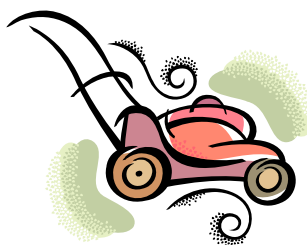
- * Take cuttings from spring-flowering plants such as pussy willow, quince, forsythia, and birch, and force them to bloom. Make cuttings with a sharp knife so you don't injure the plants. Place in a cool and brightly lit spot.

- * Place house plants where they'll receive all available natural light or supplement them with artificial light. Most plants will need only occasional watering and no fertilizer until they resume more vigorous growth in the spring.



- Too much water and fertilizer and too little light are the main causes of winter house plant blahs.

- * Take lawn equipment that needs overhauling to the shop now, before the spring rush.



- * Clean and sharpen lawn and garden tools and store them in a dry storage area. Drain the fuel tank before putting the machine away for the winter. Check belts and spark plugs and buy replacements, change the

oil, sharpen the blades or tines, and clean off dirt and plant debris so equipment will be ready to go when you need it next spring. A light coating of oil on exposed metal surfaces will prevent rusting.

- * Do not brush snow and ice off of trees and shrubs. You can cause more damage by doing this than just letting the frozen plants lean over and have the snow naturally melt off.





Gardener's Toolbox Series 2011

Where Do You Start? Planning a Garden - January 25, 2011

Be it a vegetable garden or flowers, learn what you need to know to start gardening on the right foot.



Re-Seeding Drought Killed Lawns - February 9, 2011



After the drought of 2010, learn how to revive and restore your lawn for the new year.

Discussion will center on turf varieties, renovation of lawns, fertilization, mowing and irrigation.

New Plants for Kentucky Gardens - February 22, 2011

Try a new plant that plant breeders have improved, or plant hunters have found from far away locales. After combing the catalogs and websites, learn what I have found (plant-wise) that has a chance of growing in your garden. There will be no guarantee that the plants in this one-hour lecture will be found in the garden centers or live in Kentucky.



Vegetable Gardening for Beginners - March 15, 2011

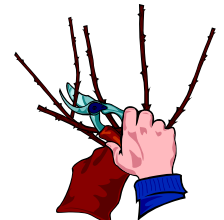
Enjoy the thought of fresh, home-grown vegetables but don't know how to start a garden?



This class will give you the basics of starting a SMALL home vegetable garden with out most of the work (pulling weeds) of a traditional garden.

How to Give a Tree a Haircut and a Bush a Buzz Cut - March 22, 2011

The pruning workshop that will teach you the "right cuts" to maintain your woody landscape plants (trees and shrubs). BYOT (Bring Your Own Tools) This will be a hands-on class and we will be outside, so dress for the weather.



Picking the Perfect Plant - April 5, 2011

Do you have the knowledge to pick the perfect plant for the spot that you are planting? In this episode, learn what the plant needs and what your garden has to offer.



How Will My Plant Die? - April 19, 2011

Everything dies at some point. But not every plant has to die an untimely death. Learn what you can do as plant-parents to keep your children out of harms way. Nutrition, care of the newly planted, and raising the green teenager will set you on the path to long-lived plants.



Spring Flower Arranging - May 3, 2011 (\$10)

Back by popular demand! Assemble a small springtime flower arrangement. The perfect gift for Mothers' Day or give the class as a gift. All the supplies for the arrangement will be included in the class fee.



Registration and payment must be received one week prior to class.

**All Classes are held at the Hardin County Extension Office beginning at 6:30 p.m.
All Classes are \$7 each, unless otherwise noted.**

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