

Feed the birds

Article written by: Kate Marsland, Master Gardener

Although our gardens have gone to sleep for the winter, they still provide food for birds and other animals. When you look out the window or take a walk in the winter you will probably see trees and shrubs with berries left on them and old seed heads left on dead flowers. Those seeds and berries are an important food source for wild critters! This month we're doing a project that provides extra food for the birds. You'll be surprised to learn they like some of the same foods *you* do!

Here are the supplies you'll need:

- **Newspapers**
- **A wire clothes hanger**
- **An apple or orange**
- **Peanut butter and a knife for spreading it**
- **Bird seed, peanuts, raisins or sunflower seeds**

Start by spreading the newspaper over a table to keep it clean while you work. You might need some help from an adult to bend your clothes hanger into a bird feeder. Hold the hook part in one hand and the long flat part in your other hand and PULL! You'll end up with the hook still at one end and a long loop at the other end. You'll use the loop to hang your feeder over a branch. You can also bend the loop over to make a big hook if you want to hang your feeder on a deck railing.

Ask an adult if you're allowed to use a knife. Then take your apple or orange and cut it in half across the middle. Now, stop and eat half of the fruit you just cut. When you're done, take the other half and press it onto the hanger hook. Be careful not to scratch your hand on the hook! Spread some peanut butter over the cut side of the fruit. You can spread it all over the fruit if you want, but it gets kind of messy. Sprinkle your seeds, peanuts or raisins over the peanut butter and press them in lightly. Your bird feeder is done!

Take your new feeder outside and hang it over a branch or railing where you will be able to see it easily from inside. Look outside as often as you can to see which birds come to dinner. Do different birds eat different parts of the food? Or at different times of the day? Do any other animals come and eat? How long does it take for all the food to disappear? You'll have a good time making all these observations.

To learn more about birds, read *About Birds: A Guide for Children* by John and Cathryn Sill. If you're older you might like *Birds at My Feeder* by Bobbie Kalman. Remember, the birds will like your treats all winter, so be sure to make more food to hang on your feeder. As always, experiment with the types of seed and fruit you use to see which one the birds in *your* neighborhood like best.