

Do Something Wild in February – Feed the Birds

February is National Wild Bird Feeding Month. Why is February designated as National Wild Bird Feeding Month? February is one of the most difficult times in much of the U.S. and Canada for birds to survive in the wild.

According to the National Bird Feeding Society, a typical backyard bird doesn't weigh as much as two nickels. They spend most of their waking hours searching for food – without the help of “hands” and “fingers”. They may consume 20% of their body weight overnight just keeping warm enough to survive. Like the mail people, they're outside in sleet, snow, wind and cold.

The National Bird Feeding Society recommends:

- Keep feeders full, so the birds have a dependable supply of food during cold weather.
- Keep feeders free of snow and ice.
- Offer suet, which is pure fat, a great source of energy for those backyard birds whose summer diet was mostly insects, like woodpeckers, as well as chickadees and nuthatches.
- Stamp down the snow underneath the feeders to help the ground feeding birds, such as juncos, cardinals, blue jays and doves.

A note- People shouldn't be discouraged if they put up a new feeder and birds don't flock to it immediately. Because birds find food by sight, it can take a while for them to locate a fresh source. Try putting a piece of aluminum foil on the ground near the feeder, where sunlight can be reflected and catch their eye.

Providing wild birds with food, water and shelter supplements their natural diet and helps them survive. A Wisconsin study showed that chickadees with access to feeders made it through a severe winter better than those without. There are benefits for adults as well. Watching wild birds serves to relieve stress and can start the day on a positive note. Bringing birds into the backyard, particularly during gloomy northern winters, adds a welcome flash of color, dash of motion and splash of sound.

Wild bird feeding is the principal connection many people have with wildlife, considering the continued trend toward moving into urban or populated areas. Bird watching can be a family affair involving all members of the family in some aspect. I've provided several websites for more information below.

You might want to purchase a book to help you identify all the birds that might be feeding at your feeder. If you have children have them count the birds and see if all the birds visiting your feeder are the same or different. You could have them keep a journal of the birds they observe at your feeder. Do the same birds come to the feeder all day? Do different birds visit the feeder? At what time of day? What color are the birds? Are there birds feeding on the ground? What sounds do the birds make? I have a wonderful resource on my shelf “Wild About Birds” The DNR Bird Feeding Guide (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources) that has a lot of information and even shows how to make feeders.

During the NCTC Open House in the fall we helped children build simple bird feeders. Bird feeders can be very simple like setting out fruits on your porch for the birds to eat to elaborate feeders made from a wide variety of materials. Children and adults can observe the daily happenings around a bird feeder. One can take photos of the birds or draw them if one is so inclined. As I'm writing this column it is snowing so I'm going to go home and make sure I have bird food in my feeder for my feathered friends.

Please make sure that you take proper care of any animals you might have outside and make certain that they have access to drinking water and not just ice. For bird identification check out the following websites:

- <http://www.whatbird.com/>
- <http://www.wildbirds.com/>
- http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/site/backyard_birds/bird_id/species_index.aspx

Other Websites to help with feeding, etc.:

- <http://www.wildbirdcenter.com/content/febnbfmonth>
- <http://www.birdfeeding.org/>

Teachers, here is a lesson plan to use with bird feeding:

http://www.teachervision.fen.com/childrens-science-activities/lesson-plan/3858.html?for_printing=1

Farming for the Future Conference The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) will hold their 2010 Farming for the Future Conference February 4 – 6, 2010 at the Penn State Conference Center in State College, PA. The 2010 Theme is The Sustainable Challenge: Providing for a Livable Tomorrow. For more information on the conference go to <http://www.pasafarming.org/conference2010>

Dale Hawkins Chef at the Stonewall Resort to Speak February 11, 2010 Anyone interest in hearing about Value Added Products is invited to come to the February 11 dinner meeting being held at James Rumsey Technical Institute to hear Dale Hawkins Chef at the Stonewall Resort present a program on Value Added Products. The speaker is preceded by a meal served at 6:30 pm on Thursday, February 11, 2010 at James Rumsey Technical Institute. There is no charge for the meal if you call and make reservations with the Berkeley County Extension Office (304) 264-1936 by noon on Wednesday, February 3 (so we can prepare properly). The speaker will follow the meal so no definite time is given. Come and have a meal with us and share with others. We look forward to seeing you there. Three Pesticide Recertification Credits will be given for attending each dinner meeting program for a total of 9 credits over the three months. Those of you needing credits to recertify here is an excellent opportunity to get credits. If you have any questions please call Mary Beth Bennett, Berkeley County Extension Agent at (304) 264-1936.

2010 West Virginia Small Farm Conference March 1 – 4, 2010 The 2010 WV Small Farm Conference is scheduled for March 1 – 4 at the Lakeview Resort and Conference Center in Morgantown, WV. This year's event features seven learning tracks:

- Fruit and Vegetable Production
- Value-adding
- Beginning Farmers
- Agri-tourism
- Energy
- Farmers Market Management
- Animal Production and Marketing

There are several special events scheduled during the week of the conference:

- Winter Blues Farmers Market – Monday evening, March 1st
- Better Process Control School – Monday and Tuesday, March 1&2
- Community Food Security Workshop and Seminar
- 2010 Agritourism Media Awards
- WV Specialty Crops Block Grant Poster Session

The conference tracks are designed to accommodate the diverse mix of experience, age, crop enterprise and interests of the region's small farmers. For more information and a registration form go to the following website: <http://smallfarmcenter.ext.wvu.edu/events/conference>

Gardening 101 Program The Berkeley-Jefferson Master Gardener Association will be conducting a free gardening seminar on Saturday, March 13, 2010 from 9:00 AM until 2:30 PM at the Berkeley County Youth Fairgrounds. Participant check-in begins at 8:30 AM. The seminar, called Gardening 101, will cover the following topics:

- Setting up a Garden
- Seed Choices
- Starting Plants from Seeds
- Container Gardening
- Pests and Weeds
- Composting
- Rain Barrels

Participants are asked to bring a brown bag lunch. The Master Gardener Association will provide drinks and desserts. For more information or to register for Gardening 101, please contact the Berkeley County Extension Service office at (304) 264-1936 or go to <http://www.berkeleyextension.com>

Garden Tips

- Order fertilizer and lime based on soil test results
- Plan spring landscape design
- Apply lime and fertilizer
- Order fruit trees
- Grow some herbs on the windowsill
- Order a high tunnel

Until next time ...Happy Gardening, and Farming!

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