

Bird Table & Feeding



Collared dove by Richard Burkmarr



Bird tables are a great way to attract wildlife to your school ground. They are easy to make and allow pupils to experience birds whilst directly helping wildlife by providing an important food resource.

Equipment list

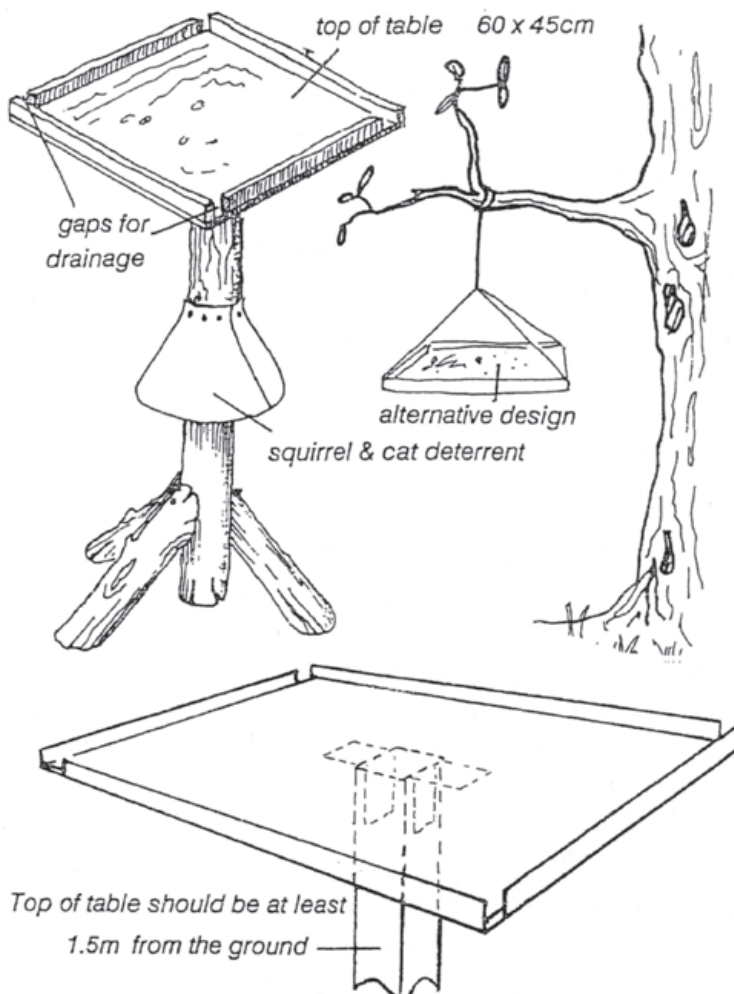
- Flat piece of wood - 60x45cm
- Wooden post
- Two metal brackets
- Wooden beeding at least 2.5cm square

Why build a bird table?

Providing food and water helps birds survive the severe winter weather and ensures they are in good breeding condition for springtime. If you are interested in watching birds the best way to attract them is to put out food. A roof will keep food fresh but is not necessary and can deter shy species. Besides, birds are much easier to watch on unroofed tables.

Making a bird table

Bird tables are essentially a flat piece of wood fixed to a post or suspended from a branch or hook. You can construct a simple table from exterior grade plywood attached to a pole with metal brackets, as shown. A lip around the table will prevent food from blowing away, while gaps in the corners allow rainwater drainage as well as making it easier to clean away uneaten food. Drilling extra holes in the tray can further help any drainage requirements.



Positioning your bird table

Make sure you locate the table away from shrubs or branches to prevent any cats preying on the birds or eating their food. Remember to provide both hard and soft food - corn or cereals will be good for house sparrows, whilst fat will attract birds which eat insects. Put out tempting specialist foods, such as peanuts for coal tits and siskins, sunflower seed for green finches and cheese for robins. Avoid white bread as it is not very nourishing.

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Robin by Wildstock

Using feeders

Suspend extra food in baskets and other containers by installing a couple of hooks beneath the table. Empty half coconut shells are good for filling with nutritious mixtures of dried fruit, seeds and brown bread set in melted fat. These will attract greenfinches, house sparrows, blue and great tits which are known for performing spectacular acrobatics whilst feeding.

Feeding birds

Make sure you provide some food all year round for your birds. It is especially important to feed them during the coldest months from October to March when natural food can be in short supply. Consider providing less food during the breeding season to encourage the birds to forage for nutritious natural foods that will enable them to rear a large brood of baby birds.

Birds will start to rely on your feeding of them, so never suddenly stop it. Ask the caretaker or a local pupil to put out food during half term and other holiday periods. Alternatively, if nobody can maintain the feeding, gradually withdraw the food over several days before you break up.

You can buy unsalted peanuts and ready-mixed seed suitable for wild birds from most pet, garden and other wildlife suppliers.

Don't forget to provide water for drinking and bathing. Raised bird baths or other vessels are best to avoid the usual predators such as cats and foxes.

Recommended food

- crumbled up brown bread (moisten if dry)
- pastry (cooked or uncooked)
- porridge oats or coarse oatmeal
- fat, especially suet
- chopped bacon rind
- grated cheese
- baked potatoes (cut open)
- dried fruit, such as raisins or sultanas
- apples, including cores and damaged fruit (especially popular with thrushes and starlings)

Insect-eaters: Robins and wagtails can be attracted by meal worms and fishing maggots.

Cleaning bird tables

Remember to clean the table to prevent diseases that could kill the birds you are trying to encourage. Use a 5% disinfectant solution to keep it free from parasites and bacteria, particularly if there has been any build up of droppings and mouldy food.



Greenfinches by Richard Burkmar



Siskin by Richard Burkmar



Enviromat