

Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri  
October Garden Corner Article  
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We are looking at an overnight low of 37 degrees pretty soon which spells the approaching end to our growing season. Most of us would agree this past spring and summer have been absolutely terrific in terms of amounts of rain received and temperatures in the human friendly category. Now we need to turn our attention to putting our gardens to bed and preparing for winter. We all have our rehearsed, well developed routines to get the jobs done; but, if you have need for a list of what to do; just give me a holler and I'll provide some ideas. The topic this month has more to do with "paying it forward" to a set of critters we may take for granite: birds. They have been with us every step of the way raising their young, carrying seeds, and eating multitudes of bugs. Now it is our turn to help them by providing food, shelter, and water. Here is what each of us can do.

Got a bird house or two? Now is the time to clean out the nesting material so as to not infect over wintering birds with mites. A lot of our winged, feathered friends remain in the area year round and they will use an empty house for shelter during the cold, winter months.

While some bugs and caterpillars remain, there is not a sufficient quantity to provide food for the birds. We are fast approaching the time when seed and suet will be greatly appreciated. What kind of food? It has taken years for my wife and me to settle upon the right mixture of food to offer our flying neighbors and it has evolved into three choices: sunflower seeds, thistle seed, and suet. The choices offered locally are varied and abundant and the decision truly depends on what types of birds you want to attract and how much you want to spend. Whatever you provide will be a tremendous help in getting everyone through the winter in fine shape. Don't forget – if you can – to leave the seed heads on your flowers. Cone flowers, cosmos, marigolds, zinnias (to mention a few) all provide after season sustenance to winged dinner guests.

Fresh water during the dry winter months is a bird magnet. A clean, heated bird bath will be the gathering pool for several months. Not

only will they come to drink the water; they will continue to bathe during the freezing temperatures as well.

Now a word of caution: When determining where to place your bird feeders and bath, take into consideration the next door neighbor's cat. Try to place the feeding area in a location where quick escape and bush/tree shelter are readily available. One additional thought – place the feeding area where you will be able to enjoy the activity during the winter days ahead. After you have purchased the food and paid the heating bill for the bath, the flurry of activity is basically free and unending. What a deal!

As always, got any questions – comments – ideas for articles? Write: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: [mandpak@embarqmail.com](mailto:mandpak@embarqmail.com) and I'll get right back with you. Until next month, get outside and enjoy this beautiful eye-popping fall weather – talk at you later.