



Keeping Busy With Birding

Five tips to attract more wild bird business

Feed the birds? Chances are your customers do. After all, an estimated 40.5 million U.S. households participate in backyard bird watching.

Considering bird feeding and watching is a consistent, year-round, all-region activity, it makes good sense the market size for wild bird seed and feeders is significant: \$5.5 billion in North America and growing.

Drawing on 30 years of experience solely focused on this industry, I've identified five solid tips for attracting more wild bird consumer business to your lawn and garden retail location.

1. Educate shoppers on how to create bird-friendly backyards.

Does your sales staff understand what it takes to create an Audubon experience? Start the education process there.

Birds seek out yards that offer food, water and cover, and they thrive in those that offer safety from harmful pesticides, chemicals, predators and other dangers in our human-dominated world.

To help your customers build a bird-friendly backyard, offer them a shopping checklist. Create a bird-friendly backyard model in your garden center, as well. Also cross-sell wild bird seed and integrate feeders with plants and other backyard necessities.

2. Extend the seasonality of your wild bird sales season.

While many people feed the birds during high gardening seasons — spring and summer — feeding wild birds during winter months, especially late winter when natural seed sources are depleted, can be very helpful and rewarding.

The key to driving year-round sales is to customize your marketing to the season. Bird enthusiasts are a compassionate group. If you emphasize the seasonal need to feed, they will respond. The following list shows the type of feed to market and stock by season, based on birds' needs.

Winter: With freezing weather, limited natural

food sources and migration, feeding in winter will save birds' lives.

Stock and promote: black-oil sunflower seed, millet, peanuts, suet cakes and cracked corn.

Spring: Energy demands are the greatest this season due to migration and nesting.

Stock and promote: fruit, in addition to nesting materials or a birdhouse; Nyjer seed for the migrating goldfinches.

Summer: For most birds food is in abundance, but drought and extreme heat can affect birds and their natural food supply.

Stock and promote: nectar for hummingbirds, Nyjer seed for goldfinches, and most importantly, water. Also, stock your current feeders as birds will still actively visit feeders that they have become accustomed to.

Autumn: Feeding birds in autumn helps migrating birds fatten up and learn where to go next spring for good food.

Stock and promote: millet, peanuts, peanut butter and suet cakes.

3. Capture sales driven by extreme weather patterns.

As much of the country experienced severe, record-breaking cold weather this past winter, the sales of wild bird seed skyrocketed. Demand for product-driving sales increased by 55 percent, and retailers stocked with product benefitted from spikes in sales. When temperatures become extreme, birders become concerned about the ability of their feathered friends to find food and shelter.

The bottom line: Keep an eye on the forecast and stock up on wild bird seed.

4. Tap into your region's and the season's top products.

While the top-selling seed nationwide is the Standard Audubon Park blend offering higher millet and black-oil content than a budget blend, product popularity varies by region and season.

In the Southwest, standard blends are the

top-seller year-round except in spring when premium blends outsell all varieties.

In the Southeast, budget blends and sunflower seeds capture 27 and 26 percent of the category with sales of specialty blends, formulated for specific birds, spiking significantly in winter.

In the Pacific, standard blends are most popular every season. Where as in the Northwest, premium blends are the standout fall and spring seller by far, but sunflower is first in summer and budget blends in winter.

New England favors standard and suet blends all year long. In the Midwest and Mid Atlantic, standard, sunflower and specialty blends are the top three sellers.

5. Create a swoon-worthy display

When customers commit to off-shelf merchandising and displaying attractive sets, their sales boost significantly. Education not only sparks, but also maintains interest in wild bird feeding, moving more consumers to become regular purchasers.

Consider these merchandising tips to boost sales year-round:

1. Help customers buy the right product. Place educational POP material that directs consumers to the appropriate type of feed for the types of birds they hope to attract.

2. Place the appropriate types of feeders near the seed that should fill them.

3. Set up a special display twice a year outside on the sidewalk or inside near the front entrance of the store to reach customers who don't typically travel to your birdseed aisle. **LGR**



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