

Summertime SPA *for* *{the}* BIRDS



Figure out how to enjoy extra gross profit dollars from your birding department.

By Mel Toellner

While millions of dollars are spent on wild bird feeders and bird seed by homeowners hoping to attract songbirds they love to their backyard, the reality is having water available year-round attracts 10 times as many birds as providing bird seed.

This is particularly true in the hot summer months when your customers would see great results in providing a “Summertime Spa” for the birds. Like a favorite spa that attracts the same human customers over and over, there are “special treatments” and “procedures” for helping your customer attract the beautiful songbirds they love.

The Birdbath Itself

The No. 1 thing to remind customers is that “moving” water attracts 20 times more birds than a flat, still surface.

When you think water for birds, never forget that 1 to 2 inches of water (at the most) are ideal. If your customer already has a water feature deeper than that, putting in a sloping entryway using stones or sand makes this feature much safer and attractive for birds to use for drinking and bathing.

Also for a customer’s existing water feature, adding a solar-powered floating mister or sprayer is a great way to attract more birds. Encourage people to try moving water in their water features and the birds and your customers will love the results and thank you. Plus, you will enjoy the extra gross profit dollars from the mister sales.

By creating a summertime songbird spa, your customers will attract more birds to their yards for several reasons.

1. It’s critical for birds to be able to find a safe, shallow place to wash and groom their feathers to maintain optimum condition to fly and catch their food (insect eaters like warblers, fly catchers, Phoebes, and more). Clean, healthy feathers also enable birds to flee from their predators.

2. Gold finches and other finch family members and some other species only eat seed. They consume no fruit or berries or moisture-

containing insects. Because of this, it's critical they have a safe water supply to help digest and flush through their digestive system the seeds they eat. Having water near a finch feeder is one of the best ways to attract a flock of feeding gold finches. Consumers love it and it helps you sell more finch mix.

Placing a birdbath in their yard or on a patio or deck is the easiest way to create a summertime spa for songbirds. Always encourage customers to place the bath where they can enjoy watching the birds drink and bathe. They'll also notice the different ways songbirds drink and bathe. Bluejays tip back their heads and take large gulps, while chickadees and gold finches are polite, almost dainty sippers.

Whether it's a concrete, ceramic or, my favorite, polypropylene bath, do your best to provide baths that are safe for the birds by featuring those with a water depth of 1 inch to 2 inches. I like the polypropylene because it doesn't freeze and break, and is easy to clean. Also, you can switch to a heated polypropylene dish in the winter to have water available in freezing temperatures.

You can add landscape pebbles or flat rocks to make areas of deeper baths safe for the birds. I've seen many garden centers actually bag and sell natural pebbles for this specific use.

Add-On Sales

We talked about add-on sales in my "French Fries with the Hummingbird Feeder" article in the March issue. Your staff's attention to add-on sales to a birdbath sale also can bring big dividends and increase customer satisfaction.

Everyone who visits a spa knows having the right tools are critical. Every customer who buys a birdbath needs a stiff bristle brush with a comfortable, easy grip handle to clean it.

Your customers can spend less time scrubbing their birdbaths and more time enjoying it by using birdbath protectors (an additive) that help ensure naturally clean water.

Encourage your sales staff to teach folks to add a capful of one of these natural enzyme products each time they refill the bath. This will help prevent stains, sludge, mineral deposits and organic contamination. Water treated with these products is safe for birds, pets and wildlife.

Your customers will appreciate these "add-on sale items" and you benefit from folks returning to your store for these effective enzyme products.

As you help consumers put the finishing touches to their summertime songbird spa, don't forget that causing water to move in a birdbath gives the same 20 times more attracting power as in a water feature.

Have your staff recommend Water Wigglers, drippers or misters that sit in a birdbath.

I've even worked with scout groups to make homemade drippers by poking a small nail hole in the bottom of a milk jug and hanging it to slowly drip into a birdbath.

An additional benefit of moving water is that mosquito eggs are not viable in it, and mosquitoes won't hatch in a birdbath with a device that moves the water. For consumers who

don't choose to have moving water (a mistake!), always have your staff recommend Mosquito Dunks (a natural additive) for the bath as a safe way to prevent larvae from hatching.

In closing I've got to remind you: Always encourage your customers to practice "safe bird bathing."

Have your birdbath or water feature near a tree or yard hook that a songbird can fly up to and shake, shimmer and dry. Wet songbirds have difficulty flying, and if a predator approaches, they can be easy prey without a safe, nearby

perch to "loungue and dry" as they leave their favorite summertime songbird spa.

By encouraging your customer to set up a summertime songbird spa in their yard, you'll enjoy the sales during summer dog days and your customers will love the songbirds they attract.

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