

Home & Garden

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help

HOW TO . . .

Choose efficient washers, dryers

High-efficiency washers and dryers are valued for their ability to drastically reduce water and energy costs. However, as with any new technology, HE machines come with new maintenance requirements and style considerations:

- Always buy the largest washer that your space and budget allow.
- Electronic touch-pad controls look sleek, but reviews say they're more delicate than knobs and dials, and more expensive to repair.
- A stainless-steel tub is preferable to porcelain because it won't rust or chip.
- Experiencing mysterious odors? This is caused by residual water in the tub of an HE washer. Add 3/4 cup of bleach to your regular white laundry cycle to remove the build-up.

— ARA

BACKYARD BUDDIES

Winter feeder

This winter, consider adding an all-weather bird feeder to your backyard. The design of an all-weather bird feeder keeps ice and snow away from the seeds, meaning fresh seed all winter. Birds can grab the seeds through a narrow gap around the body of the feeder as they stand on a bottom tray. A large overlapping cap protects the feeder - and the birds - from the elements. Check out www.birdsforever.com or www.bird-watching.com.

Tips for keeping your backyard buddies fat and happy this winter

CHRIS YOUNG
GateHouse News Service

While setting up two bird-feeding stations at Lincoln Land Community College in Illinois recently, Wade Kammin put on a mini clinic for the 10 students, staff and faculty assembled. Nearly all of the bird-feeding tips Kammin shared would be useful to anyone interested in feeding birds in the backyard this winter.

■ Kammin says birdseed with lots of filler ingredients ends up on the ground, where it attracts Canada geese and English house sparrows. Birds kick it out in their search for desirable seeds, littering the ground with the leftovers.

“We don't mind if (house sparrows) have some, but we don't want them to dominate, and hopefully we can attract more native species,” he says.

■ Goldfinches have very strong feet and can hang upside down to feed. A special feeder with the feeding hole below the perches allows goldfinches access but keeps other birds away. Kammin says other birds often intimidate goldfinches, so feeders designed to attract them should be kept 10 feet away from other feeders.

“House finches can be bullies,”

he says.

Chickadees, pine siskins and some sparrows will use the upside-down feeding station. English house sparrows have been learning to hang upside-down for short periods, but aren't a big problem, he says.

■ Regular finch feeders often are filled with Niger seed that often is referred to as thistle seed.

“It's not a thistle, but birds like it like they eat thistle seed,” says Kammin.

■ Seed cylinders of high-fat, high-energy seeds and fruit for woodpeckers can last up to two to three weeks.

“They are very hard,” says Kammin. “Woodpeckers will have to chop away and hopefully house sparrows and others will be discouraged.”

“Chickadees and nuthatches will break off little pieces and fly off,” he says. “There will be lots of activity to watch.”

■ Special trays set up for ground-feeding birds contain seeds high in carbohydrates, such as millet, cracked corn and sunflowers.

“Use a thin layer of seed, so it doesn't mold if it gets wet,” says Kammin.

Limiting the amount of seed also means most will be gone by evening, providing less of an attraction for raccoons.

■ Feeders need to be kept clean.

“Use hot, soapy water — or a little bleach water well rinsed — once a month,” he says. Feeders will stay looking new and it is less likely that birds will spread disease at feeding stations — always a danger when birds congregate.

■ Late fall actually is prime time for birds, with plentiful food and winter cold still a few weeks away. “The prairie is full of natural seeds and bushes are loaded with berries and some insects still are available,” he says.

■ Give birds time to find a new feeder.

“Birds are naturally cautious,” Kammin says. “They will sit in the trees and watch for a while to be sure there are no predators around.”



A European goldfinch eats from a birdfeeder.