

Welcoming Birds, Bees, and Bats

by Rita Pelczar

AS GARDENERS, we may tend to obsess about plants, but our gardens are habitats for all sorts of creatures, from earthworms to woodpeckers and squirrels. While some of them—yellow jackets, Japanese beetles, and raccoons, to name a few—are not always welcome, others, such as songbirds, pollinating bees, and insect-eating bats generally make our gardens more fruitful and enjoyable. The following products will encourage the latter to call your garden “home.”

INVITING AVIAN VISITORS

I love watching birds flock to my feeders, and observing the change of species as the seasons progress—migratory birds such as ruby-throated hummingbirds come and go, while others such as cardinals stick around all year.

I have a variety of feeders, but among the most attractive are two from Gardener’s Supply Company (www.gardeners.com). The **Moon Bird Feeder** is made of thick crackled glass that sparkles when light catches it; mine is blue, but it’s also available in purple. The nine-inch-wide donut-shaped feeder holds up to two-and-a-half cups of birdseed; it’s equipped with drainage holes to keep the seed dry. Birds feed both from the outer rim and from inside the disk. The **Edwardian Bird Feeder** features a 14-inch-high decorative steel cage surrounding a six-ported clear plastic seed tube that allows smaller birds such as nuthatches, chickadees, and finches access to the seed while discouraging most squirrels and larger birds. This feeder holds up to three-and-a-half cups of seed.

Hummingbird feeders come in many styles, but they all require regular cleaning to avoid a buildup of mold and bacteria. This can be challenging given their typically narrow necks and



Top left: Moon Bird Feeder. Top right: Edwardian Bird Feeder. Above: Best Combo Brush Set

small ports. Songbird Essentials’ (www.songbirdessentials.com) **Best Combo Brush Set** makes short work of cleaning hummingbird feeders. It includes two brushes, with different configurations of non-scratching nylon bristles at each end. The smaller brush is great for cleaning ports and bee guards while the larger easily reaches into feeder bottles or tubes.

Also from Songbird Essentials is the **Birdhouse & Feeder Cleaner**, a non-aerosol spray that helps you provide a clean, safe environment for birds and their young. It contains plant enzymes that eliminate parasites and organic contamination that can build up in birdhouses and feeders. To treat birdhouses, remove nesting material after birds leave for the year and scrub with the diluted



Birdhouse & Feeder Cleaner

cleaner. Feeders should be periodically cleaned throughout the year.

Water is important for your avian guests, and while birdbaths are easy to keep filled in summer, they are trickier in winter. The **Three-In-One Heated Birdbath** from the Wild Bird Habitat Store (www.wildbirdhabitatstore.com) uses a thermostatically controlled 75-watt heater to keep water from freezing when temperatures drop, and it’s effective to –20 degrees Fahrenheit. The 13-inch-diameter insulated plastic basin has a powder-coated steel exterior, and it holds two quarts of water, but it is shallow, which most birds prefer. With the included hardware, the birdbath can be mounted on a four-by-four-inch deck or fence post, clamped to the top rail of a deck, or placed on the ground.



Three-in-One Heated Birdbath

ABODE FOR POLLINATING BEES

There are about 3,500 species of pollen bees, also known as solitary or wild bees, in North America. Of these, mason bees and leaf-cutter bees are among the best known. They differ from honeybees in that they are smaller, build individual nests without help from a colony, and pollinate flowers about 15 times faster.

You can attract these non-aggressive pollinators to your garden with a **Pollen Bee Nest** (www.pollenbeenest.com) from Armstrong and Blackbury Horticultur-



Pollen Bee Nest

al Products of Caledon, Ontario. I installed one of the tube-filled nests on my kitchen garden fence at a height of 40 inches—12 to 50 inches is recommended. Bees moved into the nest less than two weeks after it was mounted.

Scientifically designed to provide a safe nesting site to a variety of pollen bees, it includes a proprietary granular rock filler that prevents moisture from building up in the nest, which can harm the developing bees. It also acts as insulation, providing bees a safe haven to overwinter. The kit includes complete instructions for installing and cleaning the nest, as well as a list of plants you can include in your garden to help attract and sustain the bees.

ATTRACTING BENEFICIAL BATS

While bats make some people cringe, they are very efficient at controlling insect populations. Every night, most bats eat their body weight in bugs—including pests such as mosquitoes. Some bats are also effective pollinators.

Installing a bat house is one way to attract these nocturnal creatures to your

garden. Many of the commercially available bat abodes don’t provide the optimal environment for bats, but the **Bat House** from Polly Products of Mulliken, Michigan (www.pollyproducts.com), meets all the criteria set by Bat Conservation International (www.batcon.org), which has certified the product. Constructed of recycled, high-density polyethylene plastic, this bat house is impervious to moisture and resists mildew; it has three chambers that can accommodate up to 150 bats, and the interior



Bat House

walls are grooved to provide traction for climbing and roosting. The house comes in four colors matched to the average July temperature and sun exposure for your location. The bat house is about 19 inches high and 15.5 inches wide, comes fully assembled, and should be mounted on a building or post in a sunny site, 10 to 15 feet off the ground, and 20 to 30 feet from the nearest tree. This bat house is pricier than many others you can find, but is worth it if you are serious about creating shelter for bats.

When you provide birds, bees, and bats the resources they need to survive, they’ll help make your gardens more productive and lots more enjoyable.

Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor for The American Gardener.