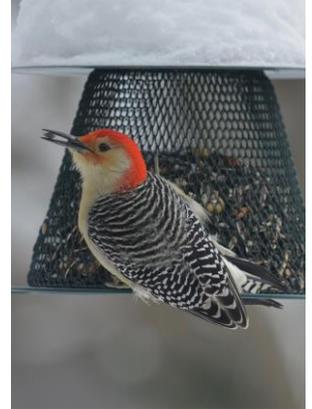




Put Your Christmas Tree to Good Use

Before taking your Christmas tree to the recycling center this year, consider using it to create backyard habitat for birds. To attract birds to your backyard, you must provide their three basic needs- food, water, and cover or shelter. Your old Christmas tree will provide excellent shelter for birds, providing protection from wind and predators. It can also serve as a feeding station, where you provide a buffet of food that our native birds love.



Before taking the tree outside, remove all decorations and lights, including tinsel. To provide the most shelter possible for the birds, place the tree on the south or east side of the house, sheltered from winter's harsh north and west winds. Anchor the tree securely by setting the stump into the ground or a large bucket of damp sand, and securing the top of the tree with twine to nearby building, fence or trees.

Add "Decorations"

Decorate your tree with strings of popcorn, cranberries or raisins. Apples, oranges, leftover breads and pine cones covered with peanut butter then dipped in birdseed can also be added. For best results, push the edible ornaments well into the tree. Popcorn will be attractive to cardinals, finches and grosbeaks. Cranberries and raisins should attract cedar waxwings, finches and any robins wintering in the area.

Suet is especially attractive to insect-eaters such as woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches and is a good winter energy source. Suet seed balls will attract juncos, chickadees, finches and native sparrows.

Press suet into the branches or hang it in mesh bags such as those that contain onions and fruit in the supermarket. It is best to keep suet balls in the shade so they don't melt. Also, keep them high enough in the tree that dogs can't reach them. Pre-made mixtures, which include suet, bird seed and a variety of dried fruits, are available at most nurseries, garden centers, pet stores, or bird supply stores.

To make your own suet seed balls, purchase suet from the meat department of your local grocery store. Mix birdseed and a small amount of peanut butter with suet while it's warm enough to be molded. One seed combination that is attractive to a wide range of desirable songbirds is: 50% sunflower seeds, 35% white proso millet and 15% finely cracked corn. Mold the mixture around a wire hook. Or fill empty orange rind halves with the suet mixture. Pierce two holes near the cut edge of the orange rind the thread a string through to make a hanger. Both the suet ball and orange rind halves can be hung in the tree.

If you decide to start feeding the birds, be consistent with your feeding. They become reliant on your feeders as a food source; empty feeders during a severe cold period or storm could result in the birds starving to death before they can find another food source.

Water is an Added Attraction

Even in winter birds need water to drink and to keep their feathers clean. A birdbath with clean water will attract many birds if the water is not frozen. Commercial immersion heaters keep water from freezing. They are available from many nurseries or bird supply stores. Providing for the winter needs of birds can result in many hours of entertainment, spent watching these beautiful creatures.

Other Recycling Options

But if you don't want to feed the birds, there are several other ways to put your old Christmas tree to good use. Again, remember to remove all lights, decorations and tinsel.



In Lincoln, trees can be taken to several recycling points throughout Lincoln after the holiday. Collection sites are open from December 25 through January 21, and are located at Ballard, Oak Lake, Seng Park at University Place, Holmes Lake, Tierra, and Woods Parks. These trees will be chipped and used to cover pathways in parks or as mulch for trees in city parks and arboreta. For more information, visit <https://go.unl.edu/tree-recycling>.

Boy Scout Troop 8 will pick up trees and transport them to a City collection location. Pick up dates are Dec. 29, 30 and Jan. 1, 5, 6 and 12, offered in these zip code areas: 68502 through 68508, 68510, 68512, 68516, 68521, 68522 and 68526. Trees should be placed at the curb by 9 a.m. for pickup. The service is free, but donations are appreciated. To schedule a pickup, contact Troop 8 at <http://scouting4trees.org> or 402-965-1458.

Another recycling alternative for gardeners is to prune off the individual branches from the tree and place them over flowerbeds as mulch; the trunk can then be cut for firewood. Firewood quality from evergreen trees is only fair, but one tree will only provide a few logs.

Finally, if you live on a farm or acreage an old Christmas tree can be sunk into a pond or lake to create habitat for young fish.

Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with University of Nebraska- Lincoln Extension and can be contacted by phone at (402) 441-7180: by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528: or by e-mail at sbrowning2@unl.edu.



Sarah Browning

Extension Educator

Nebraska Extension

In Lancaster County

444 Cherrycreek Rd, Ste A, Lincoln, 68528-1591

402 441 7180