

Gardening

WINTER BLUES IN YOUR BACKYARD? ATTRACTING SONGBIRDS LIVENS LACKLUSTER LANDSCAPES

(ARA) - The backyard can seem barren and bleak when the leaves fall off the trees and the last blooming plant retires until spring. But there's an easy way to brighten your backyard and fill it with color and song this winter - charm songbirds looking for an easy, reliable food source.

Birds are the most accessible and abundant of wild creatures that live among us, and every home - apartment to estate - can offer them a safe way station to refuel. To attract the greatest number of birds, choose feeders and foods that suit a variety of wild bird species.

Don't wait until the snow flies to get feeders in place. Fall is a good time to choose a location visible from your favorite window, to secure feeders with sturdy brackets, poles or hangers and to arrange convenient storage for your seed and supplies.

New birdwatchers may be bewildered by the huge assortment of feeders available today. A good place to start shopping is a Web site like www.SongbirdEssentials.com, which can direct you to a nearby retailer or online source.

Feeders come in many sizes and styles, and fall into a few broad categories. The three feeders every backyard bird lover should have include a tube feeder to hold sunflower or nutmeats, a hopper feeder for mixed seed and a suet holder to attract woodpeckers and other tree trunk "clingers."

Tube feeders can be made of clear plastic or wire mesh. They're sized to hold peanut kernels, sunflower or nyger seed for finches. Experts recommend filling tubes with just one type of seed so birds don't rummage through

the contents in search of their favorite treats. Songbird Essential's Seed Hoop is a unique and useful accessory to keep feeding areas tidy. The mesh tray attaches below feeders and catches 90 percent of spilled seed, keeping it off the ground and away from rodents. The hoop also serves as a platform feeder for cardinals, buntings and juncos.

Spiral Feeders offer three worthwhile innovations: a continuous spiral perch that allows more birds to feed at once, a locking lid to foil squirrels and a twist-off bottom for easy cleaning. A squirrel-proof wire mesh model is ideal for shelled sunflower or peanut hearts. Another Songbird Essentials feeder innovation is their "Clingers Only" feeder to primarily serve smaller avian guests like chickadees, small woodpeckers, titmice, nuthatches, goldfinches and others.

Suet is a high-energy fuel that helps birds survive cold winters. Tail Prop Suet Feeders attract the larger red-bellied and redheaded woodpeckers with support for their stiff tails, as well as the smaller and more common downy woodpeckers and nuthatches. Pre-formed suet cakes sized to fit feeders can include seeds, fruit or nuts for extra energy and appeal.

Position feeders near the protective cover of trees and shrubs to offer feathered friends shelter from predators. A small metal trashcan with a tight lid is handy for storing seed nearby and a scoop makes refills quick and easy.

Once feeders are up, the wait for the first bird can make even patient people antsy. Experts suggest sprinkling some seed in a shiny pie plate set under feeders. When curious birds come to investigate, they'll find your feeders, too.

For more information on feeders and other bird necessities visit www.songbirdessentials.com. Courtesy of ARAcontent.com •

Frankly

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readers know the answer to that dilemma. So I called the folks at DirecTV, who actually speak to you after you get by their automated phone answering system. The voice on the other end of the line suggested that I unplug the unit, which I did, which almost solved the problem. Like 99 percent solved, but still no picture. Then she suggested that I hit the reset button, which again almost solved the problem, but no dice.

So then she suggested that we basically reboot the DVR receiver box, so I tried that remedy. The customer service rep said that it would take about two hours to see if that would work, so I followed her instructions and begrudgingly headed down the street to continue my research. Thursday night NFL football, Laker game, etc. Couldn't be bothered with watching the games on one of the other TVs in the mansion that are hooked up to satellite. They both continued to work, by the way.

Got settled in at the research spot and mentioned my devastating plight to a sympathetic ear, or so I thought. Told her that the screen froze, and I was SOL. Expected to get a little

love, but all she said was something like, "Were you watching porn when it froze?" Can you believe that someone would think that of *Plank*? The audacity. But it was a pretty funny comment.

No, I said, I was watching *TVG*, the horseracing network. Which she said was worse than watching adult TV! I cancelled any and all of those "adult stations" when they started making me pay for them. See, I mentioned sports in the last graph. Horseracing, right?

Are you looking forward to this week's titanic tussle at the old Coliseum between the reeling USC Trojans and the Air Force Blue Bruins?

Don't remember the last time that the contest was played in the evening, but then I don't seem to remember a lot of things these days. USC has captured nine of the last 10 contests, including a 28-7 thumping of Coach Rick Neuheisel's squad last year at the Rose Bowl.

SC Coach Pete Carroll has had a couple of weeks to prepare for the game and get over the hangover that was the Stanford debacle. He walks on water, right, Trojan homers? •

Trojans

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RJ? Wow, Lakers beat the Bulls. How can I contain my enthusiasm? Maybe I'll turn a couple of cars over outside the mansion.

Okay, on to the sports stuff. Start with my L.A. King hockey team, which had such a wonderful start to the season, but now appears to be in big-time trouble because of the "upper body" injury suffered by key offseason acquisition, forward Ryan Smyth. Smyth was hurt about 10 days ago and is supposed to be out for a month or so. Which may or not be true, what with the lying that goes on in the NHL regarding injuries. Kings lost two home games after the Smyth injury. Dude better come back soon or it could be another case of same-old, same-old for the Crownshirts. Time to suck it up, fellas.

The powers that be that run the Kings organization have been misleading the faithful for the past 10 years or so, claiming that they actually care about returning a winning hockey team to Los Angeles. Put up or shut up, AEG. But it was good to hear some of the King players were taking it to heart after a recent home-ice loss to the Calgary Flames. Captain Dustin Brown nuted up, telling Hall-of-Fame writer Helene Elliot that the Kings had players "not playing hard enough, for one, and not playing together."

And goalie Jon Be Nimble, Jon Be Quick also chimed in on the responsibility angle. After giving the Flames kudos for being a darn good team, the franchise goalie added that "we have to prepare ourselves mentally and physically and come up with a better showings than we have these past two games. We're better than that. We know that."

Good to hear the words, fellas. A crummy 14th in the Conference finish won't be ac-

ceptable, fellas. At least to us diehard King fans, like MB entrepreneur Joe R.

Had to throw this in, right now. Just saw another infomercial from the very-dead Billy Mays. Selling something that sticks to something. Please, TV guys, knock off this abomination. And how does his hair seem to get darker every day? Dude is six feet under. Mentioned my gripe to *RJ the Golfer*, who didn't agree with my Mays' comments. Think he said something to the effect that dead celebrities are all over the TV, pitching products. Frank Sinatra, Fred Astaire, Jack Nicklaus. Catch that one, discerning reader?

All right, so my Angels re-upped with Bobby Abreu at the start of free agency. Good move. Guy is a damn good outfielder, wanted to stay with the Halos, and wasn't looking to shop around. And wasn't represented by a tough negotiator, some may say a butt-head, like Scott Boras. Apparently the Halos don't want to get involved with any of the Boras guys, like outfielder Matt Holliday, who is shopping his wares after finishing last season playing with the Saint Louie Cardinals, and basically blowing their playoff series against Los Dodgers by mis-handling a key fly ball in game dos of the series.

Remember that one, folks? I know you do, *Dodger Girl*. I saw you jump for joy when the two-out, bottom-of-the-ninth-inning fly ball bounced off of the privates of Mr. Holliday, allowing the inning to continue and the Dodgers to eventually win the contest.

Per usual, I have run out of space and run out of time. And the Galaxy are just beginning the first overtime period in the MLS Championship tilt. Didn't turn out too well for the locals, did it? •

Earthtalk®



Earthtalk Fashion

Dear EarthTalk: Can you enlighten on the environmental impact of the fashion industry? As I understand it, the industry overall is no friend to the environment.

Tan Cheng Li -Malaysia

According to the non-profit Earth Pledge, today some 8,000 synthetic chemicals are used throughout the world to turn raw materials into textiles. Domestically, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that one-quarter of all pesticides used nationwide go toward growing cotton, primarily for the clothing industry. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers many domestic textile-manufacturing facilities to be hazardous waste generators; and lax standards and enforcement in developing countries, where the majority of textiles are produced, means that untold amounts of pollution are likely being deposited into local soils and waterways in regions that can hardly stand further

environmental insult.

Luz Claudio, writing in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, considers the way Americans and Europeans shop for clothes as "waste couture": Fashion is low-quality and sold at "prices that make the purchase tempting and the disposal painless." Yet this sort of so-called "fast fashion" leaves a pollution footprint, with each step of the clothing life cycle generating potential environmental and occupational hazards.

According to *Technical Textile Markets*, a quarterly trade publication, demand for man-made fibers such as petroleum-derived polyester has nearly doubled in the last 15 years. "The manufacture of polyester and other synthetic fabrics is an energy-intensive process requiring large amounts of crude oil," reports Claudio. In addition, she says, the processes emit volatile organic compounds and solvents, particulate matter, acid gases such as hydrogen chloride, and other production

by-products into the air and water.

"Issues of environmental health and safety do not apply only to the production of man-made fabrics," says Claudio, citing subsidies to the pesticide-laden cotton industry that keep prices low and production high.

In an effort to green up the industry, Earth Pledge launched its Future Fashion initiative in 2005 to promote the use of renewable, reusable and non-polluting materials and production methods. Besides putting on its own Future Fashion showcases, the group organized the January 2008 New York Fashion Week, encouraging designers to create and showcase greener clothing on their runway models.

Green-leaning designers can also pick through Earth Pledge's library of 600 sustainable produced textiles, including organic cotton as well as exotic materials such as sasawashi, pina, bamboo, milk protein, and sea leather.

Another effort underway to speed the fashion industry into a carbon-constrained future is the Ethical Fashion Forum, which provides a variety of tools and resources and runs training sessions and networking events to help facilitate moving the industry towards more sustainable practices.

One stumbling block to the greening of fashion is that only a small number of consumers—some analyst's say less than one percent—will pay more for a greener shirt.

But if the industry itself can improve its footprint from the inside and drive the costs of more eco-friendly materials and processes down, the benefits will trickle down to consumers, whether they are bargain-conscious or fashion-conscious.

Send your environmental questions to: EarthTalk® P.O. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881; earthtalk@emagazine.com. Read past columns at: www.emagazine.com/earthtalk/archives.php. EarthTalk® is now a book!