

When you're down, go out and buy some birdseed

By LEM MESELE

When you were feeling low, did you ever splurge on something just to get even with Fate?

We've all done it. A person with a miserable job situation or a family problem goes out and buys herself a hat, or himself a pipe. They feel better and kind of get even with the world.

I had the blues like that one year when the first bad winter snowfall hit. For some crazy reason, I went out and got a bird feeder.

Our subdivision was still relatively new. The developer had knocked down every tree, shrub and weed in sight,

outdoors

and it was several years before we saw even a few sparrows.

To those of a snobbish bent, sparrows are the bums of the ornithological world. Their songs aren't much. But on a bleak morning when the sparrows at your feeding station are the only signs of warm-blooded cheer — well, you learn to appreciate those little brown creatures.

Our offering was a packaged

birdseed from the supermarket. Later we tried sunflower seeds, but we had no takers. Our subdivision just didn't have enough cover for a great enough variety of birds to attract sunflower seed eaters.

Since then I have stumbled along a chart from the local Cooperative Extension Service explaining what kinds of food are eaten by which kinds of winter birds. Naturally, you can't attract species of birds if they aren't in your vicinity.

Here's the menu:

Mixed seeds are favored by the sparrows, juncos, goldfinch, pine siskin,

cardinal, snow bunting, purple finch, pine grosbeak, redpoll and horned lark. Sunflower seeds are yummy to the chickadee, nuthatch, cardinal, bluejay, evening grosbeak, crossbill, tufted titmouse, and goldfinch. Local chipmunks and flying squirrels may also go for them.

Beef suet, hard fat, peanut butter and cottage cheese are favored by the woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadee, tufted titmouse, brown creeper, golden-crowned kinglet, ruby-crowned kinglet, bluejay, starling and the squirrel.

Soybeans, wheat, oats, small corn, millet and larger seeds are favored by such gamebirds as bobwhite quail,

ruffed grouse and pheasant, along with mourning dove, meadowlark and small mammals.

THE MOST IMPORTANT thing about running a feeding station, though, is you can't just do it as the mood strikes you.

If you want lots of customers, start feeding in the fall. That encourages birds to stick around.

And you can't retreat and forget your little friends when the snow is a yard deep. They need your help most when you are most inclined to lethargy in front of the TV set.

The Cooperative Extension Service

came up with a hint I hadn't thought of. When there's snow on the ground, birds have plenty of water. But sometimes our ground is bare and frozen. Birds need water.

So here's their ingenious advice for a watering station: Start with a large tin-ware funnel supported by a drain tile. Run an outdoor electrical cord and light socket through the drain tile and into the funnel. Insert a 50-watt bulb in the socket.

Then place a pan of water on top of the funnel. The lighted bulb throws off enough heat and the funnel channels it, to keep the water from freezing. You'll have to let the bulb burn day and night.

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