

Valentines ... For the Birds!



During midwinter, when food is scarce for wildlife, why not show some love for backyard birds while decorating your yard for Valentine's Day?

These cheerful decorations can be eaten by birds and are made with ingredients you may already have or can easily pick up at your local supermarket. They can even be made by young children, with a little help from an adult. Hang them up outside—it's a great opportunity for bird-watching when your feathered friends come to snack on the treats!

What you need:

- 1 ½ cups of oatmeal (instant is fine)
- 1 cup vegetable shortening or suet
- ½ cup peanut butter
- 1 ½ cups cream of wheat cereal, uncooked
- 1 ½ cups corn meal
- red food coloring (optional)
- large bowl
- mixing spoon
- measuring cups
- heart-shaped cookie cutter
- plate or shallow pan for birdseed
- any kind of string, ribbon, or yarn, cut into 12 inch lengths
- cookie sheet
- sunflower or other bird seed
- chopstick or pencil

What You Do:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Cook oatmeal according to package directions (microwave in large bowl). Add other ingredients in bowl, stirring first with spoon; you can use your hands when mixture gets too stiff.
3. Sprinkle some flour on your working surface and on your hands. Take a tennis-ball sized handful of dough and place it on the floured surface. Flatten the dough to about ½-inch thick. Cut out as many heart shapes as you can. You can dip the hearts into a dish of birdseed to coat them or press seeds into the heart to create a design.
4. Using a chopstick or pencil, make a hole through each heart (for where the string will go).
5. Place hearts on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 15-20 minutes, until lightly brown. Cool on pan.
6. When completely cool, tie strings through holes. Hang outdoors from trees or shrubs.

From the National Wildlife Federation – nfw.org

<http://blog.nwf.org/2011/02/kid-friendly-nature-crafts-for-valentines-day/>

Here are a few pointers for a successful winter bird feeding season:

- Provide high-calorie rich foods such as suet, nuts, and black-oil sunflower seeds that are rich in fat and protein.
- Even in cold weather, clean feeders regularly to prevent the buildup of bacteria that can cause disease.
- Stamp down the snow below the feeder so that ground-feeding birds can gather up the seed that drops from the feeder.