

Bird Tables



Bird tables can make an attractive and interesting addition to even the smallest of gardens. Here are some tips on how to get the best out of them.

When should a bird table be used?

Bird tables are usually left in position all year round, but feeding birds is most important during the winter months, as that is when birds need it most and natural food is scarcest. Although unnatural foods are not good for nestlings, adult birds are usually careful about what they give their chicks, and can use the food to give themselves additional energy to feed their young.



Where should it be?

A raised table is especially useful because it can be seen from the comfort of a chair, whereas the ground below may not be visible through a window. It will also reduce the risk of cats sneaking up on the feeding birds. A garden is not essential - a feeding tray may even attract birds to a windowsill on a block of flats!

Place your bird table on top of a post, or hang it from a branch or bracket. Although they can look unsightly, complicated wire cages around the table can be successful squirrel deterrents, as can an inverted biscuit tin near the top of the post. Don't put your table within easy reach of a fence or tree from which a cat can leap, but place it near a bush which gives birds somewhere to 'queue up' for a place on the table, or to dash if disturbed.

Should there be a roof?

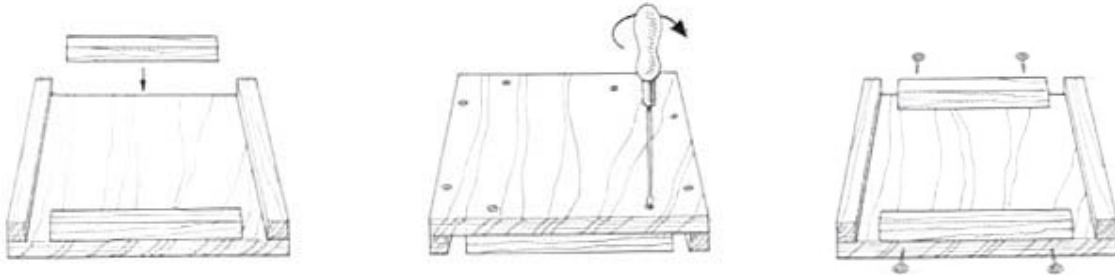
A table with a roof gives extra places for seed feeders or nut bags, and will keep the food dry but an open one is really just as good. If your table doesn't have a roof it is important to make sure there is somewhere for rainwater to drain off to prevent your bird table from becoming a bird bath!



How can I make one?

Use a piece of exterior quality plywood or some similar board which will not split in wet weather, about 30x50cm and 1 to 1.5 cm thick (these dimensions are only a guide). Fit some strips of wood about 1 or 2 cm high along each side to form a rim around the edge, leaving a gap at each corner to make it easier to sweep clean and to let water drain out.

To hang a table, use small screw-in eyes or hooks at each corner. Attach equal lengths of nylon cord or light metal chain to each hook and tie together in the centre, or, better still, make a loop at either end across a horizontal branch. This stops the table from spinning round.



A table on a post is easier to position, but you need to put the post firmly into the ground to prevent the table toppling over. Use a post 150-200cm long, either placed in a hole or driven in with a heavy hammer. A table standing on the ground on a cross-shaped base can be blown over more easily, but it can be fastened down either with pegs driven into the ground or by placing stone weights on the base. Use two or four small metal angle brackets at the top of the post to fix the tray, or small blocks of wood which can be screwed to the post from the side and then to the tray from underneath.

A few nails or hooks in the edges of the table will be useful for hanging nut bags or wire baskets for kitchen scraps. Treat the whole table with wood preservative if possible; creosote is fine if it is allowed to dry thoroughly before the table is erected. Clean the table regularly to prevent any risk of disease to the birds. Also, move it from time to time, as droppings will accumulate underneath.

