

## Feeding bluebirds in winter by Don Hazel

As you know, bluebirds are insect eaters. They survive the winter by finding insects on warm days, but especially by eating wild fruit like mistletoe, sumac, blueberries, black cherry, tupelo, currants, wild holly, dogwood berries, hackberries, honeysuckle, bay, pokeweed, and juniper berries. Birds have learned to survive winter just fine without our help, but many folks like to see them up close at their feeders.

Bluebirds will come for suet and mealworms in the winter, or even year-round. Just keep in mind that if you are offering lots of supplemental food that the birds might be missing important nutrients that they get from their normal wild diet.

The suet recipe below is great for attracting all kinds of birds, but be sure to add the ingredient, "chick starter". Chick starter can be found at any feed store and it is used to provide the vitamins and minerals to grow healthy baby chickens. It helps keep bluebirds healthy when they are relying on human provided food instead of their normal diet of insects and fruits.

Likewise, you should dust mealworms in calcium carbonate for your bluebirds. Mealworms by themselves in large quantities, are calcium depleting. You can buy calcium carbonate in feed stores or online. Shake your mealworms in a plastic zip lock bag before placing them outside to give bluebirds important calcium.

Often feeding wildlife can cause more harm than good. Using chick starter and calcium carbonate can keep you winter bird feeding positive for the birds.



Photo Courtesy of Becky Boyd

### All Season Suet Recipe

Bluebirds seem to love this suet mix much better than the commercial suets.

1 cup regular or crunchy peanut butter  
2 cups quick cook oatmeal  
2 cups cornmeal  
1-1/2 cups lard (no substitutes here)  
1 cup white flour  
1/3 cup sugar  
1/2 cup of Chick Starter (available at feed stores or Tractor Supply)

Melt peanut butter and lard together, (use very low heat)

Stir remaining ingredients together very well.

Then mix thoroughly with peanut butter and lard.

Pour into freezer containers and refrigerate till solid.

Then cut into size to fit your suet feeder.

Store in fridge or freezer.