

Creating Bird Feeders with Recycled Materials

Step by Step Instructions

Bird feeders can increase the natural diversity of outdoor learning environments and provide opportunities for children to observe birds from their classroom windows or outside. Children can create their own bird feeders with easily accessible recycled materials.

Materials and Tools Needed:

Here is a list of materials to create your birdfeeders. Part of the exercise is collecting natural materials to use for decorating.

Use your creativity and imagination! (Figure 1)

- Paper milk cartons are best, but plastic is OK too
- Scissors
- Spray paint
- Acrylic paint
- Small art paint brushes
- Leaves, twigs, acorn tops, and other natural materials for decorating
- Quick-dry tacky glue
- Thin wire for hanging
- Wire cutters
- Bird seed (**do not use bird seed that contains peanuts, because children may have nut allergies*)

1. Collect Milk Cartons

Paper milk cartons work well for this activity, but plastic ones work too. Rinse the carton well, and allow it to dry with the top off. Save the screw top. Half gallon cartons are ideal, but quarts will work too. For plastic containers, either gallon or half gallons work well.

2. Spray Paint the Milk Cartons

Spray paint the milk carton a fun color. This should be done before the children start the activity. (10 minutes)

3. Cut an Opening into the Bird Feeder

After spray painting, cut "windows" into the side of the milk carton. Cut a 3 inch rectangular opening 2.5 inches from the bottom of the carton. You can leave a portion of the flap attached, and fold it outwards from the top to act as a rain shield for the bird feeder. Poke a hole on opposite sides of the feeder 1 inch under the bottom of the cut out "window," which

will be used to insert a perch for the bird. (20 minutes) (Figure 2)



Figure 1 - Finished bird feeder

4. Decorate the Bird Feeder

Let the fun begin! Collect small natural objects like leaves, twigs, and acorn tops to decorate the bird feeder. You can also use small manufactured objects like buttons. Quick-dry tacky craft glue works well to attach decorations to the bird feeder. You can use acrylic paint to add more color and patterns to the bird feeders. (30 minutes) (Figure 3)

5. Add a perch

Use either a chopstick or sturdy twig as a perch. Feed it through both holes you poked, just under the “windows.”

6. Add bird seed

Fill the bird feeder with bird seed that does not contain peanuts. Black-oil sunflower seed is a good option.

**Avoid bird seed that could potentially contain peanuts for children with nut allergies.*

7. Hang the bird feeder

Cut a small hole in the top of the bird feeder. Cut an 18 inch piece of craft wire, and feed the wire through the hole and twist it back onto itself close to the top of the bird feeder. Tie the other end of the wire loosely around a tree branch, arbor, or post, so that the bird feeder can freely hang. Birds prefer feeders to be close to habitat for protection, such as small trees or large shrubs. Locations close to windows also work well, so children can see the bird feeder from inside the classroom.

Birds may accidentally fly into glass, so it’s recommended that you put artwork or decoration on the inside of your classroom windows. This will allow birds to see the window more easily, and allow children to enjoy the birdfeeder from both inside and outside!

7. Refill the bird seed as needed

Regularly empty out empty shells from the bird feeder and re-fill as needed.

Enjoy and have fun!

**Make sure to keep sharp objects and spray paint out of reach of children during this project.*



Figure 2 - Bird feeder ready for decorating, after it is spray painted and the “windows” are cut out by the teacher



Figure 3 - Natural materials that can be used to decorate the bird feeder

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