



Let's face it – birds are sloppy eaters. All that flapping, hopping and hanging at the feeder means a lot of contact between birds and their eating surfaces. So if a bird feeder is not cleaned regularly, it may create an environment where pathogens can thrive and diseases can spread among birds.

That's why it's vitally important that bird feeders are cleaned at least once a week (and more, if possible). Before it becomes a habit this cleaning may seem a chore. However, given all the enjoyment we receive from observing garden birds, it's our responsibility to keep feeding zones safe and sanitary.

Here's how to properly clean a bird feeder.

1. **Gear up.** Have a dedicated brush that's just for cleaning the bird feeder. An old toothbrush is handy, as is a bottle brush for a nectar feeder. Always wear rubber gloves when handling a dirty feeder too – birdy bacteria is not great for humans either.
2. **Empty the dregs.** Leftover seed or fruit may be contaminated so bury it in the compost pile or somewhere well away from the bird feeding station. Birds may be tempted to eat it otherwise! Dispose of any sugar water or nectar that's been sitting around for more than a few days – it can ferment, causing dangerous bacteria to form.
3. **Take it apart.** Some bird feeders are made from multiple parts while others may not be so easy to disassemble. If it's easy to separate, it's easier to clean.
4. **Soak well in warm water.** This will remove any hardened debris.
5. **Scrub thoroughly.** Use a squirt of gentle dishwashing liquid and make sure all old food and crusted dirt is dislodged. Rinse well.
6. **Allow the feeder to dry.** Then, when it is completely dry, refill it with your local flyers favourite NZ-made bird feed.

More simple tips for safe bird feeding:

- **Use a thoughtfully-designed feeder**

Feathers and faeces can easily find their way into poorly-designed bird feeders. That's why it's so important that birds can perch at some distance from the feed. Open feeding dishes should be cleaned every time they're filled, because they can quickly become contaminated. A wide base or numerous perching points on a feeder allow birds to spread out as they feed. And as outlined above, a clean feeder is a safe feeder. So look for a well-designed bird feeder that is easy to take apart for cleaning.

- **Offer nutritious bird feed**

We like to believe that chucking bread crusts out on the lawn for the birds is a thing of the past. But, unfortunately, it still happens. If you see someone feeding bread to wild birds politely remind them that bread is absolute junk food for them – and that goes for ducks too. Bread is full of sugar, yeast and carbohydrates, with none of the essential minerals and vitamins needed to keep little bird bodies healthy.

Feeding cut-up fruit is a good option too (as long as seeds are removed before doing so). For the seed-eaters, avoid imported seed which is heat-treated (this process strips out essential nutrients). Topflite Wild Bird Seed is grown in mineral-rich New Zealand soil which we carefully balance for optimal nutrients. For nectar-feeding birds, sugar tends to be the go-to. Consider Topflite Nectar which includes a blend of vitamins and minerals, as well as pollen, giving it a nutritional advantage over sugar water.

- **Feed birds in a seasonally appropriate manner**

In summer, reduce the amount of sugar water, seed and fruit provided to birds. There are lots more natural food sources around during spring and summer, when flowers are blooming, plants go to seed and insects are plentiful. Fill up nectar feeders periodically and be wary of warmer ambient temperatures – the warmth can increase bacterial growth on dirty feeders and put birds at risk.

In summertime, regularly putting out a clean source of water may be more useful for birds. It can be a long flight between drinking stops on hot days! Cleanliness is top priority again, as birds tend to use the water in a bird bath or Splash and Feed for both bathing and drinking. Clean your bird bath or drinking dish using the instructions above.

Winter is when a little extra feed goes a long way. Put out Energy Food, nectar and fruit to help native birds enter the spring breeding season in form. While native birds don't feed on seed, many introduced species like finches, yellowhammer and thrushes do. They'll also appreciate a helping hand before the busy springtime.

When natural food sources are limited, particularly in late autumn and winter, congregations of birds at feeders tend to increase. This is when hygiene becomes even more important and regularly cleaning your bird feeder is vital.

