

How To Keep Birds Away From Your Garden

by Diane Keller, Fairfax Master Gardener

We all love seeing those beautiful colorful birds in summer. We love watching the many nests being built, the laid eggs and the baby birds taking their first flight. Birds are also a benefit to our gardens, keeping bugs away such as cabbage worms, aphids, moths, stink bugs and grubs but they can also be a nuisance. Birds will eat the buds of our vegetable gardens, flower beds and fruit trees and shrubs. They may eat the fruit of our raspberries, blueberries and strawberries. They may also peck away at the flowers in our garden to feast on the pollen. Birds can be quite a nuisance during the summer months. How do we keep the birds we like to see any other time of year away from our crops? There are many helpful tips to prevent the birds from eating away at our gardens just long enough for us to reap the harvest.



photo: Cory Tanner, ©2021, Clemson Extension

Bird netting

Depending on what you are trying to grow in your gardens will determine how to effectively keep birds away. Birds love fruits such as blueberries and raspberries. Apple trees, peach trees and other fruit trees will draw birds to their fruit. One effective way to deter the birds from eating the fruit is to put netting over your tree or shrub. It is best to attach netting to a frame that holds it away from the tree or shrub to avoid birds accessing the fruit at the outer edges. This method is very effective in keeping birds at bay while letting the fruit continue to grow.

Another way to keep birds away from your gardens is to use “frightening devices” such as noisemakers and visual repellents. These can be effective deterrents, but birds figure them out quickly and can reenter the garden. The noisemakers and visual repellents should be rotated so that the birds do not become used to the distraction. Some noisemakers include bird bombs and shellcrackers. These are devices that are fired from a firearm or launched using devices specifically for that use. They can also be launched by hand. Frightening devices include items like Mylar streamers and “scare-eye” balloons.

University of Massachusetts Extension Center for Agriculture suggests that grape Kool-Aid might be a solution for some gardeners to use. Grape flavored Kool-Aid contains a grape compound called methyl anthranilate. This compound has a taste that birds do not like. They suggest to “mix 4 packets of grape Kool-Aid in one gallon of water and spray the plant and fruit when the fruit begins to color and attract birds. Several applications during the season may be necessary.”



Scary eye bird deterrent

photo: Holly K. Ober, UF/IFAS

Spraying plants with table sugar is another tip for keeping birds away from your garden. Cornell University, Department of Horticulture, has studied that “birds can easily digest the simple monosaccharide sugars found in fruit such as glucose and fructose, but many birds lack the enzymes necessary to digest disaccharides such as sucrose (table sugar).”

Another easy tip to keep birds away from your garden is by providing several other sources of food for the birds to flock to. Putting up bird feeders away from your garden will help to keep the birds near the food source and away from the vicinity of your garden.

Hanging old CD's with string in the midst of your garden might help. The sun reflecting on the discs will distract the birds and keep them away. Fake predators and wind chimes might also help, too.

Garden fleece or floating row covers may be good deterrents especially when seeds are just sprouting. This will enable the seedlings to take root and begin to grow into a mature plant before the birds can eat them.



photo: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Streamers, windmill, scary eye, and owl for woodpecker deterrent

All of these tricks and tips for keeping birds away from your garden are best used when in combination with each other. Birds provide critical ecosystem, economic and cultural services, many of which interact with growers, their families and communities. Managing the deterrence of birds during the growing season in a creative and sustainable way will ensure that we can enjoy the many benefits that birds provide.

References

- [The Blueberry Bird Problem](#), Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- [Managing Bird Damage on Fruit Farms](#), Michigan State University Extension
- [Birds on Tree Fruits and Vines](#), University of California, Integrated Pest Management
- [Bird Protection for Blueberries and Other Fruit](#), University of Massachusetts Extension
- [Non-Lethal Bird Deterrent Strategies](#), Oregon State University Extension Service