

Please DON'T FEED the Wildlife!

(A message from the Missouri Department of Conservation)

Most Missourians in urban and suburban areas enjoy and appreciate wildlife around their homes. To attract more viewing opportunities, people sometimes put food to bring wildlife in closer to their homes. While the Missouri Department of Conservation encourages you to fill your birdfeeder, leaving food for other urban and suburban wildlife – such as deer, coyotes, raccoons, and geese – can do more harm than good. Here's some reasons why...

It's Not Good for Them

Many Missouri wildlife species have complex digestive systems that cannot properly digest additives in processed foods. Foods such as bread or popcorn when fed to Canada geese do not provide adequate nutrition to wildlife and may make them sick. Most wildlife species eat a variety of natural foods to get the right balance of energy and nutrition. Wildlife eating a large quantity of one type of food may not get adequate nutrition. This can make it difficult for individual animals to survive the winter.

It Changes Natural Feeding Behavior

Supplemental feeding turns wild animals into beggars. Even if you're providing nutritious food to wildlife, this can change natural feeding behaviors and patterns of wildlife. Animals may change their movement patterns and concentrate in higher than normal numbers around a feeding site. Many animals congregating at a feeding site increases the chance of spreading disease.

It Creates Conflicts with Wildlife

A healthy fear of humans is good for both wildlife and people. When this fear is lost and animals see people as a "free lunch," this may lead to aggressive behavior and conflicts with both wildlife and neighbors. Supplementally fed deer, for example, don't leave other food sources alone. High concentrations of deer near a feeding site tend to heavily browse nearby vegetation as well. Neighbors of a person who feeds deer often experience worse landscape damage due to the supplemental feeding.

Keep Wild Neighbors Wild

- Secure all outdoor trash cans so you don't invite scavengers.
- Don't leave pet food out, especially at night.
- Elevate bird feeders 5 to 6 feet if you live in areas with deer.

It Can Attract Unwanted Pests

You can't be selective about wildlife you're feeding. Sometimes supplemental feeding can attract unwelcomed guests, such as mice and rats. While attracting vermin may not be intentional, it is often a drawback to feeding urban and suburban wildlife.

Want to Help Wildlife? Think Habitat!

There is no good substitute for quality habitat. Rather than providing supplemental food, concentrate on improving habitat condition in your area to help wildlife.

- Plant Missouri native plants around your home. The berries, seeds and nectar of Missouri's native plants provide a rich and varied food supply throughout the year.
- Provide cover and nesting space for wildlife. If you want to see wildlife around your home, make sure the birds and animals have cover from predators and a place to nest. Brush piles, dead wood (make sure it's not a hazard), and nesting boxes are all great ways to provide habitat.

For More Information about urban wildlife, contact the office or center near you.

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