

Fall Is For Feathered Friends, Fireplaces

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URBANA – Birdseed, and firewood are two common topics that show up every fall. Both take some planning to be successful.

“Feeding the birds means starting earlier than later,” says [Richard Hentschel](#), University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator serving [DuPage, Kane, and Kendall counties](#). “Birds need to know early on that there will be something to eat on a regular basis if you want them to hang around in your yard.”

With the recent outbreak of songbird deaths, Illinois officials are not currently recommending removing feeders, but stress cleaning and sanitizing feeders every two weeks and hummingbird feeders weekly.

Buying birdseed that has a little bit of everything for every bird can add up to a lot of wasted seed on the ground. Consider putting out seed that will attract only your favorite birds. This can be more cost-effective as the unwanted seed will feed four-legged critters, not to mention make a mess on the patio or in the lawn.

The type of birdseed chosen will also help determine the kind of feeder needed. Typically, feeders are designed for the size of seed being distributed — thistle versus sunflower, for example.

“You may end up with several feeders catering to a variety of your favorite birds,” Hentschel says.

Birdseed can be a feeding source for pantry pests such as the Indian Meal Moth, so keep seed securely covered and consider storage in a cool garage.

Most think of feeding birds, fewer think about supplying water, too. Consider birdbaths that have a heating element to keep them from icing over in the winter.

Now on to firewood. It is never a good idea to burn “green” firewood in the home fireplace as it will take heat away from the room and can add substantially to the creosote buildup in the chimney. Outdoors it can make for so much smoke it is impossible to sit close enough to enjoy the fire.

“It may not be critical to have the best firewood to burn in an outdoor fire pit, yet it is an entirely different story for the indoor fireplace,” Hentschel says.

Seasoned firewood means the wood, for logs more than 6 inches, has been cut, split, and dried for a long time. Clues that the wood is seasoned are a gray color on the ends of a log and checkmarks showing moisture loss.

Firewood should be around 20% to 25% moisture to burn well and limit smoke. Those who purchase well-seasoned wood need to keep it dry before burning it.

“Make the woodpile easy to uncover and recover,” Hentschel says. “Or you will find yourself leaving the cover off and allowing the firewood to reabsorb the water you paid to remove.”

As a rule, the heavier the firewood, given the same moisture content, the more heat it will give off. This is something to consider if there are different tree species available to purchase.

Once the home fireplace is being regularly used, only bring in the amount of firewood expected to be used in a week. It takes more than a week to “thaw out” any outdoor insects that have hidden in cracks and crevices on the bark.

“This practice will keep the insects from wandering around your home and, while not likely to do any damage indoors, will keep the family peace,” Hentschel says.

As an additional precaution, when stacking firewood next to the outside wall of a home, leave a few inches between for good air movement and an extra barrier for insects.

More information about cutting, purchasing, and burning firewood is available at go.illinois.edu/Firewood.

SOURCE: [Richard Hentschel](#), Horticulture Educator, University of Illinois Extension

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