

Give Birds a Feast with This Suet Feeder

If your family cooks bacon or other meats, sometimes you end up with solid fat leftovers called suet. This project re-uses some cooking leftovers to make a gourmet treat for your local birds. It's a fun way to help your child gain scientific practice by identifying and categorizing our feathered friends. Once your bird-feeder is finished, get cozy by the window and find out which birds live in your neighborhood! Warning: use this birdfeeder in winter when temperatures do not rise above 50°, otherwise your "glop" may melt and it won't be so fun!

What You Need:

- Can of leftover cooking fat or suet, solidified (not oil)
- Heavy saucepan
- Birdseed that's appropriate for birds in your area
- Tin can (empty 15-16 ounce tomato sauce cans work perfectly)
- Piece of cardboard
- Piece of sturdy string, about 4 feet long



What to Do:

1. Start by helping your first grader trace the bottom of the tin can onto the cardboard, and cut the circle out.
2. Then, punch a hole in the middle of the cardboard piece and pull the end of your string through it. Have your first grader knot the string tightly so that it can't pull all the way through the hole.
3. Put the solid fat into the heavy saucepan and melt it slowly over low heat until it is liquid.
4. Remove the pan from heat and add birdseed, about twice as much birdseed as fat. Then leave on a counter and let the whole mixture cool slightly, so that it's thick and "globby."
5. While everything is cooling, get your tin can ready. Cover a countertop with old newspaper or another absorbent surface in case of drips.
6. Push the cardboard into the bottom of the can with the string sticking out.
7. Have your child help you spoon the glop into the can, filling it all the way to the top. Push it down to remove any air pockets, too. Be sure the string is still sticking out.
8. Then put the whole mix into a cold refrigerator until it hardens completely.
9. Once your new birdfeeder has hardened, it's ready to share with the birds. Use the string to pull it out of the tin can, and then hang it from a nearby tree.
10. Invite your first grader to observe when the birds feed, what kinds of birds he sees the most, and if the birds get along with each other.
11. Enrich your child's learning even more by making a chart to hang on a wall near your favorite birdwatching window. Use a bird book to identify the species of birds that have been visiting your feeder. Use a scanner or copier to print out a small identifying picture, and then write the name of each type of bird on the chart. Help your first grader read about the bird, and keep track of the birds he observes in a daily journal. This also helps their reading and writing skills!