

## Dogs and Bird Feeder Frenzy

**Place wildlife feeders wisely to prevent canine frustration.**

*Cheryl S. Smith*

Winter is a great time for feeding wildlife, but have you ever stopped to think about your dog when deciding where to place those feeders?

A bad choice can lead to barking and hard feelings, but a good one can keep everyone entertained and happy.

Most people think of birds come winter, but feathered visitors aren't the only ones you can invite to dine. Squirrel feeders are also popular, and in some areas ducks stay through the winter.

When it comes to wildlife feeders, dogs respond in one of three ways: no interest, fascination with the feeder as a kind of doggie TV, or over-the-top stimulation often leading to unwanted behavior. Before you place a feeder in a permanent location, it pays to know how your dog will respond.

Many hunting breeds naturally find bird feeders fascinating. Place an active feeder within their view and they'll watch for hours, happily occupying their time while you're at work or running errands. Most dogs are satisfied watching silently, so problems only arise if you redecorate and disrupt your dog's view. Some can be quite insistent about regaining access to their source of Discovery Channel-type entertainment.

So ensure that you can commit long-term to both the feeder location and its visual access before you get your dog hooked on bird watching.

A dog's response to squirrel feeders is more individual and less predictable. Some dogs show no interest, although that's rare. Far more show a high level of interest, often high enough to cause problem behavior. If your dog barks when a squirrel comes into sight, installing a squirrel feeder within her regular view is asking for trouble. You may have an entertained dog, but you may also have a lot of disgruntled neighbors.

In addition, your dog will naturally want to get as close to the feeder as fast as she can when outside. This can mean trampled plants on the route to the feeder. In this case, choose a feeder location away from any plants you are hoping to protect and where your dog won't do damage when she inevitably charges the feeder. Wildlife comes to depend on feeders during the winter months, so taking them down suddenly can have harsh consequences. Instead, take your dog's response into account and find a feeder location that works for all.

Cheryl S. Smith's book, *Dog Friendly Gardens, Garden Friendly Dogs* (Dogwise, 2003, \$19.95), focuses on combining dogs and gardens successfully. You can visit her website at [www.writedog.com](http://www.writedog.com)