

Make a Suet Ball

Ages 7
and up

Suet is animal fat that has been rendered (melted and cooled) to form hard cakes, balls, or other shapes. Suet is a great food to offer birds in the winter when they need more calories to keep their bodies warm. While ready-made suet balls, blocks, cakes, and plugs are available in stores, making your own is easy and affordable. There are plenty of suet feeder options available. Use recycled mesh onion bags as an inexpensive alternative. (avoid woven citrus bags as birds may tangle their claws in the fine mesh)

Easy suet recipe:

- 1 cup rendered suet, see Suet Tips below
- 1 cup chunky peanut butter
- 3 cups ground cornmeal
- 1/2 cup white or wheat flour

You may also add some of these special ingredients:

- Chopped nuts, (no salt, candy-coating or seasonings)
- Raisins, dried cranberries or other dried fruit bits
- Birdseed or cracked corn
- Insects, dried mealworms or crickets (pet stores)

Directions:

1. Melt the suet and peanut butter together in a pot until they are liquid and blended.
2. Add the cornmeal and flour. Mix well. These ingredients make the suet crumbly or "peckable" in freezing weather. Add your special ingredients for a custom recipe.
3. Let the mixture to cool to room temperature, form into balls with your hands or an ice cream scoop. Place the balls on a baking sheet or dish, spaced so they are not touching. Chill or freeze until solid.
4. Slip a suet ball into a mesh bag. Tie a knot in the top of the bag. Use sturdy twine, tied below the knot, for hanging the suet ball. (Or use wire if squirrels are a concern)
5. Hang outside for your backyard birds to feast on. See *Feeder Basics* activity for information on safe placement of feeders. Re-fill the bag as needed.

Suet Tips

There are a few different ways to make or find suet. Try different types to find the one best suited to your backyard birds and your budget. Never use bacon fat. (lots of salt and additives)

Best for Birds - Buy beef fat trimmings in chunks or ground (labelled "suet") in the meat department, check the freezer, or from a butcher. The fat needs to be rendered, melted completely, before adding any other ingredients. Rendered suet can be cooled to a solid and stored in the freezer for several months.

Easy for you - Buy lard at the grocery store. Note: it may melt in the summer heat. Vegetable shortening can be used in place of animal fat.

Expensive but easy and good for birds - Buy ready-made plain suet cakes or chunks from a bird feed store or pet store. Melt down the chunks to use in your recipe. This is the most expensive choice, as the cakes have already been processed and are ready to go.



Tip: Make suet cakes or shapes for your suet feeder. Pour the still warm suet mixture into molds or containers which fit your feeder. For plugs, roll cooled suet into logs to fit your plug style feeder. Chill suet until solid. Store airtight in the refrigerator or freezer.

