

*Natural news*

# Summer feeders are worthwhile in spite of common controversy

By ART BRIGGS-JUDE

A good title for this column might be "The Birds of Summer." Yet these words are not about the winged creatures that require a field trip to discover, but rather about the feathered friends you could have right in your own back yard.

But the mention of feeding birds in the summer months to some people often gets me into hot water.

You've probably heard the majority of the reasons for not putting out feed for our most beautiful wildlife. It's unnatural; the birds don't need it; they become dependent on handouts; the young birds choke on the seeds; etc.

I don't buy it. Sure summer feeding is unnatural, but then again the same could be said for the winter

custom. And as far as not needing it, well, they've got to eat someplace, so what's wrong with giving the birds a free meal when they need it — winter or summer?

Remember too, wild birds devour other items besides those you provide on the shelf, so an increased avian population will give you some extra weed seed and insect pest control — naturally.

Then of course there's this dependency notion. To me this is a cold weather problem that occurs when the birds have no other food source. It's interesting to note that if wild birds are so dependent on sunflower seed, for example, why do some species like the big yellow grosbeaks forsake it in the spring?

If it's nesting territory they're seeking, I think the

local evergreens are every bit as suitable for nests as those they find upon arriving in the still-frozen north.

Our particular purple finches, on the other hand, are the exact opposite, arriving at the food shelf in early spring and departing by September. Truth is, most wild birds move on the urgings of an inner seasonal clock with food playing a minor role in their migration patterns.

Some years ago, about the time someone came up with the story about cranberries being carcinogenic, another story surfaced about young birds choking on seeds.

In over 40 years of feeding wild birds at all seasons, I've never seen that happen. In fact, the many young birds that have been brought to our feed trays

would certainly have provided us with an opportunity to see such a problem occur if it did exist.

Actually some species, such as goldfinches, can be seen regurgitating the small seeds into their youngsters' mouths.

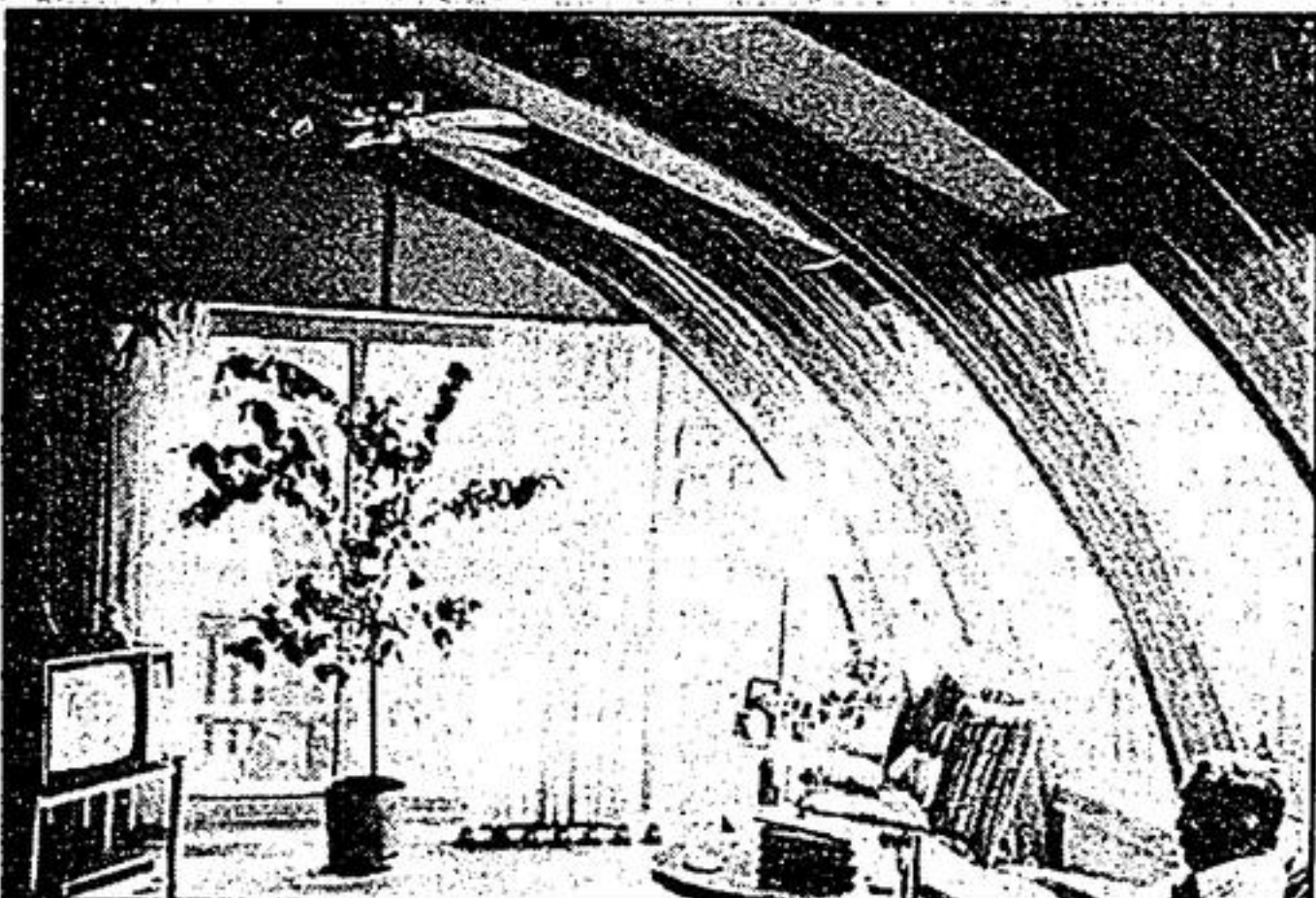
And while on the subject of small seeds, the small black sunflower seeds will attract more kinds of birds than the large striped variety.

Hopefully aided with the above information, you can feel free to throw some sunflower seed on the feeding shelf.

For summer birds are a great addition to your yard and garden, not only by singing and showing themselves, but by bringing along their often-amusing youngsters for your added pleasure.

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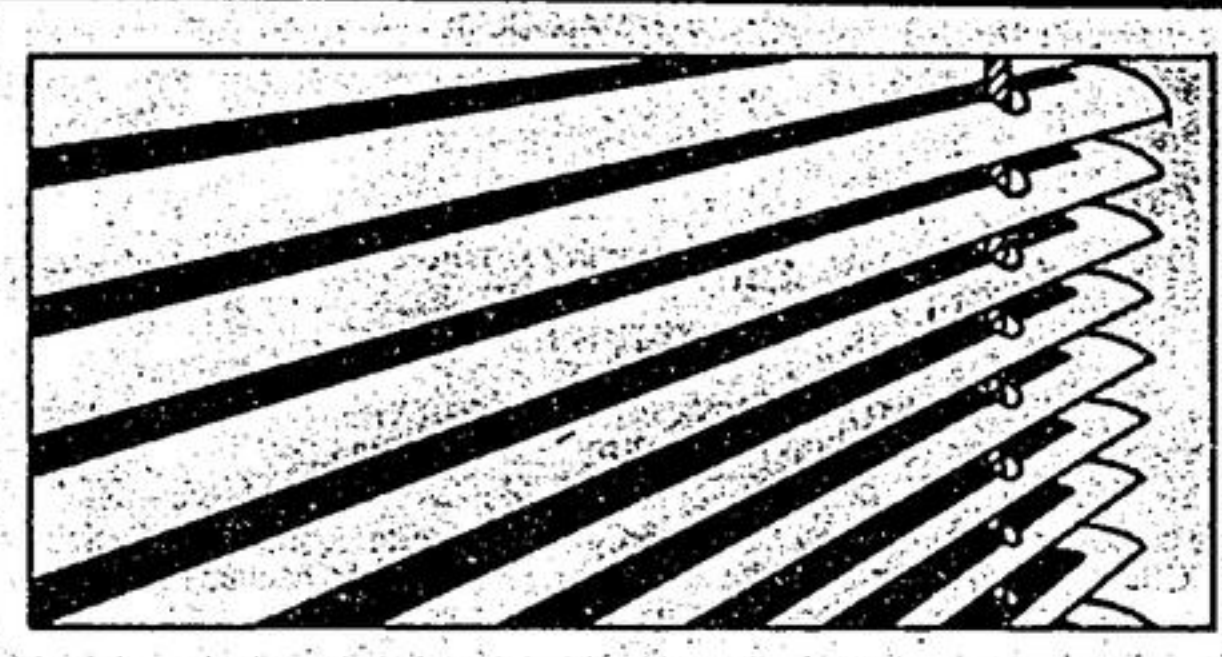
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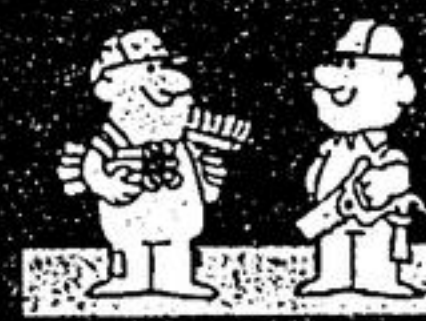
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