



Fresh-cut Christmas trees give birds sanctuary after the holidays

The gifts are unwrapped, the last of the holiday meal leftovers have been polished off and grandparents have returned home. While some families enjoy leaving the Christmas tree up for as long as possible, others are ready to take it down and box up the ornaments for next year.

For those who may be tired of vacuuming up pine needles from the floor, don't just toss the tree on the curb for recycling. Turn it into a natural bird feeder and shelter for the birds in the landscape.

Although the decorated tree certainly took center stage inside the home during the holidays, it can be a fun addition to the landscape as well. After the ornaments and lights are removed, leave the tree in the stand, or place it in a bucket of dirt, and set it outside. Not only will it provide a splash of color in the winter landscape, it also will be a safe haven for birds. The tree will give them a place to hide from the cold as the dense branches will provide protection from the wind, rain and snow.

Not only can the tree provide a cozy habitat, it also can be a source of food – not the tree itself – but it can be a place to hang strings of popcorn or cranberries the birds can munch on.

A fun after-Christmas family activity can be making edible ornaments for the tree. In addition to popcorn or cranberries, gather some pinecones and smear with peanut butter and roll in birdseed. Tie some colorful yarn to the top of the pinecone and hang it on the tree.

Another option is to string red or green grapes on pipe cleaners. Make a circle out of the pipe cleaners and they look like miniature wreaths on the tree. Slice up some apples and hang them on the tree with regular ornament hooks or yarn. Once the birds have eaten the apples, they can use the yarn or string for nesting material.

If you have any leftover mesh bags such as those that onions come in from the store, fill those with chopped fruit and hang them on the tree. Wintertime can mean slim pickings for our feathered friends, so any help you can provide in the way of nourishment is good for them. Before you know it, the landscape may be filled with chickadees, song sparrows, cardinals and a host of other birds who are glad to find the food and shelter.

For those who may not want to turn the old Christmas tree into a bird feeder, check with city officials about a tree recycling program. In many communities, trees are collected and turned into mulch for local parks and public gardens.

While the Christmas season can be somewhat short, families can extend the joy of the holidays with a Christmas tree bird feeder.

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