

Recycled Wire Hanger Bird Feeder

Here's a science craft project for your fourth grader, with an appealing bonus: it'll help you get rid of what's old and unwanted, transforming it into something new and interesting! It's made by reusing an old wire clothes hanger and loaded with feed made from seeds mixed with discarded kitchen fat. In other words...it's good for birds, good for learning, and good for the planet, too!

What You Need:

- Lightweight wire coat hanger
- Large lemon
- Wire cutters
- Sturdy needle-nose pliers
- Old junk saucepan



What You Do:

1. Use the wire cutters to cut your hanger on one side, just before it starts twisting to make the hanger's hook handle. Leaving the hook handle, straighten the rest of the wire to make one long piece.
2. Now, beginning at the base of the hanger hook, use your pliers to start wrapping the wire around your lemon, starting with the narrow top of the fruit. Spiral the wire loosely around the lemon until you reach the bottom of the fruit; end with a narrow curl, and cut off any remaining wire.
3. Your spiral is now a wire "spring," and if you pull it gently, you can easily remove the lemon. Pull out the fruit, and put it aside.
4. You're now ready to mix up your bird food mix. In an old, junky saucepan (one you don't mind getting messy), melt some fat. This may be kitchen fat, such as the stuff left over from cooking bacon or greasy burgers; or you can get suet—solidified animal fat—from your local butcher at little to no cost. Whichever you choose, melt down a dollop, let it cool slightly, and then add birdseed in a ratio of two to one—two parts birdseed to one part fat. When the glop is cool and relatively solid, shape it into lemon-shaped balls, the same size as the fruit you just used.
5. When your bird food mix has cooled fully, load it into the twisty bird feeder and hang it from a nearby tree. Local birds may take a few days to find your bounty, but once they do you can expect a raucous avian extravaganza!
6. Finally, as the bird population comes to your feeder, invite your fourth grader to explore some natural science. Which kinds of birds use the feeder most? Notice, especially, their beaks: are these "tweezer beaked" birds? Wide billed "clothespin beaked" birds? Which kinds of beaks are best suited for this kind of feeding?
7. Two final cautions: first, store your leftover bird seed mix "lemon blobs" safely in your refrigerator or freezer until you're ready to reload your bird feeder...and second, do remember that this is a wintertime craft. The hangers look beautiful on bare winter branches; in temperatures above 50 degrees or so, the suet has a way of melting. So enjoy those chilly months with your backyard birds, and congratulate your fourth grader on her contribution to their well being!