

# A Bird in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush?

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You know the old saying. Well, believe it or not, you too can have a bird in the hand!



*Carolina Wren*

landing on your shoulder and eating nuts and seeds straight from your hand this winter!

All it takes is patience, persistence, and well, MORE patience. If you regularly feed birds in your backyard, you might want to try getting to know some of them up close and personal. The songbirds in your backyard can soon be

Before you get started, there are a few points to mention here. It is helpful if you have a few bushes and shrubs for the birds to fly to when frightened, and it also gives them a place to perch while closely observing you. It is also advised that you begin this only after birds have been regular visitors to your backyard feeders.

Start in early fall by putting out seed in the feeders at the same time of day when you wish to try the hand feeding. After filling the feeder, you should stand or sit about 12 feet away for a few minutes. It is important that you remain very still, with no sudden movements. If you use a chair or stool, be sure it is the same one each day, and in the same spot. Do this weekly until birds fly readily to the feeder nearby. Once they become accustomed to your presence, go a foot or two closer to the feeder each week. Soon, before winter has passed, the birds will come to the feeder while you are standing right next to it.

The next step is to then remove all of the seed, and hold your hand next to the feeder with food in your up-turned palm. If you wish to wear gloves, be sure they are the same ones each time. Stand quietly and wait. It often takes 20-30 minutes, and sometimes without success. Don't give up! The bird in the bush will eventually come to your hand.



*Eastern Bluebird*

As you stand quietly, listen carefully for sounds of chattering and wings fluttering.

You can rest assured that the birds are watching, and soon some of the more timid ones will also come to your hand. Henceforth, anytime you are outside, your feathered friends will rush to greet you – although you may be only going out to the mailbox, they will be with you wanting a handout.



*Northern Cardinal*

### Tips

- The best time to try is on a cold day in early fall.
- Do not move if possible. Even your eyes! As they get used to your presence, movements will be less critical. Again, they will get used to you and when one comes to your hand, you can slowly move your eyes to look at it. Talking to the birds is fine, but avoid sudden movements.
- It helps to include chopped walnuts or pecans in the bird feeder, and then later in your hand. These nuts are a treat to many bird species.
- Keep pets confined.



*Carolina Chickadee*

Eventually, astonished friends and neighbors will be able to hand feed the birds, too. A well-known North Carolina naturalist, John Terres once said – “An experience of this kind will win the hearts of more people than all the pleading for bird conservation made in all the books ever written”. How true! It takes time, repetition, and patience to teach wild birds to eat from your hand, but once they do – your heart will soar.