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## Deterring Birds

Protecting your garden and home from messy birds

From [Mona Zemsky of Bird-X, Inc.](#), for About.com

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Birds and associated diseases are hot news -- people worry and wonder about bird flu jumping species -- but in fact there are already over 60 different human diseases associated with birds and their droppings, some of which can be fatal. You've heard of salmonella and bed bugs, but add to this list tongue-twisters such as histoplasmosis and cryptococcosis. In addition to diseases, birds can cause esthetic and financial heartache for property owners and gardeners.



Bird Netting Over Grapes  
Photo Courtesy of Bird-X, Inc.

- Droppings cause unsightly stains, deterioration of structures and devalued property. Not to mention the cost of fixing/maintaining/cleaning up.
- Pigeons (perhaps fed by a neighbor) are messy and ugly.
- Woodpeckers can destroy wood homes, shingles and siding.
- Great blue heron can eat valuable fish in your pond.
- Starlings and blackbirds can eat the fruits (and vegetables) of your labor.
- Canada geese will ravage grass and leave up to a pound a day (per goose) of droppings.

To end bird problems there are several options, depending on the budget, desires and restrictions of the homeowner.

Lethal options are not recommended, as they only treat the symptoms, not the problem itself. Meaning, poison, for example, does nothing to make the area undesirable to the birds; new birds will continue to come if there is a reason they like it there. Trapping birds is a lot of labor, and again doesn't do anything about new birds. Of course it's usually more desirable (and more economical) to treat the problem once and for all, not perpetually. Furthermore, lethal methods also cause extremely negative publicity among one's neighbors.

But...birds are stubborn – they will want to stay if they're happy and comfortable. The goal is to make the area undesirable and unappealing (via sound, odor, taste, visually or physically).

### Sound deterrents

These are often employed against pigeons, woodpeckers, starlings and blackbirds. As birds will get used to the same sound repeated over and over, choose a device that has built-in change involved, for example one that varies in frequency, duration, and sequence, and features the sounds of both birds in distress and predators looking for food. This is a key factor in long-term discouragement.

### Visual devices

Visual devices are usually used against pigeons, starlings, blackbirds, woodpeckers and more. As with sound deterrents, change is important. If you just put a plastic owl in the yard, they'll quickly realize that it isn't really a threat since it never moves. To work long-term, a repeller must involve movement. One option is a large orange sphere that has holograms on front and back. It appears to move when the bird looks at it from different angles. In addition to the eyes moving, it's mounted on a spring that causes the entire predator to move and bounce in the wind.

Another visual option to scare birds away is iridescent bird deterrent foil. You simply cut off strips and attach them to fence posts, trees or rooftops to scare the birds away. As the strips blow in the wind, they catch sunlight, producing constantly changing colors and patterns. And the tape itself produces a metallic rattle, unnerving birds with the sound too.

### Physical barriers

Bird spikes (think "barbed wire for birds") prevent a bird from roosting on a nearby ledge, sill, roof peak, etc. Bird netting works well too. If birds don't have easy, comfortable roosting access to your property, they are less likely to congregate there.

### Taste aversions

A food-grade biodegradable spray (a bitter, smelly component of Concord grapes) will keep Canada geese from eating your grass, and will keep woodpeckers from finding your wood surfaces appetizing. This methyl anthranilate spray targets their taste and smell senses but won't cause the environment any harm. In fact it has been used to flavor grape candy, soda and gum for years.

If you have an especially bad problem, or the birds have been returning for many years, you may want to use a combination of methods to scare the birds away. Whatever it takes to give the impression that your property is not a fun, relaxing, inviting place to stay.

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