

Milk Carton Bird Feeders

Objective:

To generate awareness of birds in the schoolyard by understanding where local birds live and what they eat.

Background Information:

Try to familiarize yourself with the names of birds common to your local region before conducting this lesson. If you are from Seattle, some common birds are the warbler, robin, wren, sparrow, humming bird, swallow, and chickadee. Try to find pictures of these birds ahead of time.

This activity teaches students to care for the animals in their local habitat. By making a birdfeeder, students will learn about the food that birds eat. The bird feeder is made by smearing vegetable shortening mixed with cornmeal onto a milk carton. Note that peanut butter is not used because it is hard for birds to swallow. Mixing the vegetable shortening with cornmeal apparently prevents difficulties with swallowing.

Many elementary school cafeterias provide milk for their students each day. These milk cartons are likely thrown in the garbage after the students have used them. By collecting the milk cartons and turning them into birdfeeders, students learn about reusing materials.

Materials:

Shortening

Corn meal

Bird Seed

Crushed egg shells (calcium supplement)

1 milk carton per student (pint)

Yarn

Wooden skewers

Hole Punch

Sturdy tape (like duct tape)

Pictures of birds common to the region (<http://www.audubon.org/>)

1 plastic cup per student

1 plastic spoon per student

1 plastic knife per student

Newspaper

1 paper grocery bag.

Preparation:

1. Collect one small milk carton for each student from the school's cafeteria. Wash the milk carton out with water.
2. Poke one wooden skewer through the bottom of one of the walls of each milk carton so that the skewer emerges from the opposite wall as well. This serves as a perch.
3. Poke another skewer through the other walls of the milk carton. Now all four walls of the milk carton should have a perch poking out from them.

4. Break off the pointy tips of the skewer so students do not hurt themselves.
5. Tape a piece of duct tape to the top of the milk carton. Double the tape back on itself so that there is no sticky side. The tape serves as a structure to attach the yarn to hang the birdfeeder.
6. Hole punch the piece of tape.
7. Thread a piece of yarn through the tape and tie it so the students may hang the birdfeeder easily.
8. Cover the work surface with newspaper. Set up a spot for each student so that each student receives a plastic cup with shortening in it (two large spoonfuls of shortening is sufficient), a plastic knife, and a plastic spoon.
9. Dump the birdseed into a sturdy paper grocery bag that is large enough for the students to fit their birdhouse into.

Procedure:

1. Take the students outside and have them sit quietly. Ask them to listen for birds and to point in the direction of a bird's call if a student hears one.
2. Ask the students what type of birds they have seen in their yard, at school, in Seattle? Point these birds out if you see them or show a picture of common birds.
3. Ask the students "What do you think birds eat?"
Insects, worms, fruit, and seeds!
4. Inform the students that they are going to be making birdfeeders today by pasting birdseed onto milk cartons that were collected from the cafeteria instead of throwing them away.
5. Where is a good spot to hang a birdfeeder?
Out of the wind, hanging from a branch, 15 feet away from window, close to water. Also, a bird feeder should be at least four feet above ground so that it is out of reach of cats.
6. Return to the classroom and have the students sit at one of the spots at the table.
7. Add one spoonful of corn meal to each cup. Tell students to mix the cornmeal and vegetable shortening thoroughly.
8. While the students are mixing, pass out one birdfeeder to each student.
10. Instruct students to spread the shortening/cornmeal mixture all over milk carton with their knife.
11. When students have finished spreading the cornmeal evenly over the milk carton, have them raise their hand. Bring the paper bag full of birdseed over and have them place their milk carton in it. Allow students to shake the bag so that the birdseed covers the milk carton.
12. Review appropriate locations to hang the birdfeeder. Tell the students they may reapply shortening and seeds if needed.
13. Hang the birdfeeder in a tree in the schoolyard or the students may take them home to hang in their backyard!