

## How to: Create & maintain birdbaths



A birdbath is a wide, shallow dish of water, often raised on a pedestal, that allows birds to drink and bathe, and is especially useful in hot weather and during freezing conditions. Any garden centre will have a range of designs to choose from, or you can also easily make your own



Photo: Alf Beard via Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Steve Head



Photo: Mark Winterbourne via Wikimedia Commons

### Target species:

Many garden birds such as blackbirds, blue tits and wood pigeons will use birdbaths. Insects such as honey bees and wasps will also benefit from being able to drink from the edge of a birdbath during hot weather.

### How to do it:

The simplest bird bath could be an upturned metal dustbin lid supported on three bricks, or a very large plant-pot saucer. You can buy commercial bird baths in a great variety of styles and prices, but make sure they abide by the golden rules below.

- Avoid shiny plastic baths as they are too slippery for the bird's feet to grip safely.
- Birds like to bathe in shallow water, so make sure the bath is no deeper than 5-6cm at most and has shallow sides. It is really an artificial puddle you are providing. You can add large pebbles or gravel in the bath for small birds and insects to perch on. Try to choose a birdbath that is easy to clean and that won't shatter in a frost.
- Baths raised on pedestals are more expensive but much easier and safer for the birds to access.
- Shallow water will dry out quickly in summer and freeze over quickly in winter, so keep an eye on it and refill/thaw it when necessary.
- Place your chosen birdbath in an area of your garden that is close to cover and out of direct sunlight, either at ground level or on a pedestal. If cats pose a risk for bathing birds, try using a hanging dish instead. Make sure the birdbath is stable and you can get to it easily to top up and clean. Fill your birdbath with clean tap water and you are ready to go.

### How easy is it to do?

Very easy - you can easily make your own birdbath or buy one from a garden centre. Then all you need to do is place it in your garden and add water!

### **How much will it cost?**

You can spend as much or as little as you want on a birdbath. Home-made ones cost nothing. The cheapest you can buy is around £12, but elegant garden-enhancing stone structures can cost hundreds of pounds.

### **How effective is it for the target species?**

Very effective. Water features like a birdbath are valuable for many birds and insects and will be very well used.

### **Golden rules – what the science tells us**

- Birds are nervous of steep or deep water. Many available to buy are too steep-sided and/or deep and/or small. A width of 30cm or more, and maximum depth of no more than 5cm is ideal.
- Keep the bird bath out of prolonged direct sunlight, which can make the water too hot, and increase evaporation
- Good hygiene is vital to ensure that the birdbath does not become an area for disease transmission from bird to bird so clean regularly (every week or so), preferably using a stiff brush and non-toxic cleaner such as Enviroclens or Ark-Clens. You can use a 1:25 bleach solution but you will need to swill it thoroughly before re-filling it for the birds.
- Drinking insects need very shallow sloping edges or stones as perches.
- Keep the bath ice-free in winter using warm water. Never use de-icer or salt.

### **What to look for?**

Watch for birds visiting your birdbaths - you'll be able to see them splashing the water over their feathers. Bird poo in the water or white waxy flakes from wood pigeons are tell-tales that your bird bath is being used – and that it needs a clean!

### **Things to be aware of**

Birds are very vulnerable to predators like cats when bathing, so site the birdbath carefully, ideally not close to thick cover, and yet with access to trees and bushes nearby. Be extra careful if siting one on the ground, birdbaths raised on a pedestal offer a better vantage point for birds.

### **Finding out more:**

How to: Bring [water into the garden](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_bring_water.pdf) [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_bring\\_water.pdf](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_bring_water.pdf)

How to: Improve your [garden for birds](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_birds.pdf) [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_birds.pdf](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_birds.pdf)

RSPB [advice](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/how-to-make-a-bird-bath/) on bird baths [www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/how-to-make-a-bird-bath/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/how-to-make-a-bird-bath/)

BTO [advice](http://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/feeding-garden-birds/hygiene) on hygiene for garden birds [www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/feeding-garden-birds/hygiene](http://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/feeding-garden-birds/hygiene)