

Singing for their supper

Build a bird feeder in cheerful colours to attract some feathered friends.

Small children seem to identify with birds readily. Who knows, maybe they'd like the freedom to dig up a worm for breakfast (my boys are fascinated by worms)? Or perhaps they enjoy watching their feathered friends in the trees singing their hearts out with infectious joy?

Birds are willing workers in the garden and do a great job as organic insect police, on patrol against bug infestations among the veg. They love insects, spiders, snails and slugs, and help pollinate some crops and control weeds. We have a lot to thank them for.

In winter, we watched the wax-eyes come in droves to pick at the fallen fruit beneath our old apple tree because the ground was covered in snow, and it was hard to find much else to eat. That's when we decided to build a feeder.

It's easy to foster a love and understanding of nature when birds arrive daily to eat from a feeder. Kids don't notice the educational benefits as they observe the various species eating different foods and displaying individual behaviours.



I painted the roof with Resene Red Berry and the sides in Resene She'll Be Right. Then our arty photographer Rachael drew a floral pattern on the walls with a pen, and we took turns painting it. The white we used was Resene Alabaster, and we mixed this 50/50 with Resene Red Berry to create a spring-like pink. We combined Resene Blue Bark 50/50 with Resene She'll Be Right to make the dark blue.

Resene
the paint the professionals use

HOW TO BUILD ONE

I asked my clever neighbour, Callen Foskett, to build me a bird feeder.

Callen cut the following pieces from an untreated pine panel (2000mm x 600mm x 18mm). Ask your local timber supplier to cut them to size.

Base: 1 x piece 200mm x 18mm x 440mm

Sides: 2 x pieces 200mm x 18mm x 350mm, each cut to a 45-degree peak for the roof

Lip: 2 x pieces 75mm x 18mm x 400mm

Roof: 2 x pieces 200mm x 18mm x 500mm

You will also need wood screws 8g x 40mm, PVA wood glue and a rope or chain to hang it.

Assembly is straightforward. Start by screwing the sides and lip to the base, then the roof boards to the sides. The roof will have a slight overhang to keep out the weather. Even so, drill a few holes in the base so any water that does get in can drain away. Also drill a couple of holes in the roof for the rope or chain the feeder hangs from.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before painting, I undercoated the feeder in Resene Quick Dry Waterborne Primer Undercoat to protect the untreated pine used to build it. Untreated timber is best for a feeder as there are no nasty chemicals to leach out, and this waterborne primer is Environmental Choice-approved. Then topcoat in your choice of Resene colours using Resene Lumbersider or you can choose a higher-sheen finish like Resene Sonyx 101 or Resene Lustacryl if you prefer.



WHAT TO FEED

The native birds you are likely to attract to your garden prefer to eat fruit, nectar, insects and foliage. Try cut fruit such as oranges, apples, and pears. You can also make some sugar water to put in a dish for them – the best sugar-to-water ratio is 1:8, e.g. ¼ cup sugar dissolved in 2 cups of water.

Forest & Bird has some advice on keeping birds safe and what (and what not) to feed them. Visit forestandbird.org.nz