



Johnson's Garden Talk

Lawn and garden information for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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Go For The Gold

Mike Hargrove, Johnson's West 13th Store Manager

Early spring is the best time to see the American Goldfinch in your yard. Wichita and southern Kansas are on the northern part of the goldfinch's wintering territory and the southern part of their summer breeding territory, so at this time of year you'll find more goldfinches in our area than any other season.

Their numbers will keep building until the middle of May and then just as the males are about to complete the change into their courting plumage, they leave town and head out to the countryside for their nesting season.

Goldfinches build their nests with the down of wild thistle and feed their young the seeds of sunflower and thistle so they need to be in areas where those food sources are abundant.

You can enjoy this finch in your own backyard by offering it black oil sunflower and nyjer in finch tubes. Many people get frustrated feeding nyjer (commonly referred to as thistle) because they make some common mistakes when offering it to the birds. If you live in town, the best time to feed nyjer is October through mid May when the goldfinches and pine siskins are here.

Nyjer is such a small seed that it can dry out and lose its oil content and nutritional value, so make sure any seed you buy is this year's crop. Since it is imported from Africa and Asia, the new crop arrives in October and November each year. Once the seed is put in a feeder it starts to absorb moisture and will last for no more than six weeks until a mold forms and it loses its appeal to the finches. So replace your seed every six weeks. (Right now the finches are emptying my feeders in about six days!)

It is a good idea to give the feeder a good shake every time you walk by it to make sure the seed still flows in the feeder. There are a lot of finch feeders out there that have a solid brick of nyjer caked in them from seed a year old or more.

If you have never tried feeding the goldfinches, now is the time to get started with a finch feeder and nyjer. ■