

# Chip Notes



## The Goodness of Corn

### The Case FOR Corn in Backyard Feeders...



Corn is an ideal ingredient for wild bird food mixes. It is highly palatable to virtually every seed-eating bird that visits backyard feeders. It is a significant source of crucial nutrition for avian species. When used in any form other than whole corn, it will not germinate in lawns. It is a cereal grain with a difference! Unlike the soft-fleshed grains, the hard texture requires a seed-eater's bill to crack and consume it.

Our backyard songbirds spend most of their waking lives foraging for food. They have very high energy needs. They are warm-blooded and must maintain their body temperature. Flight is an energy-intensive activity. Birds instinctively make food choices based on these energy needs. When a dependable source of food is discovered, it becomes a regular foraging site. Aspen Song® products are blends of seeds that meet the caloric requirements of our guests. Corn is an important component of this diet.

To list the specific feeder birds that readily accept crimped and cracked corn would mean listing all of the seed-eaters. Most people know that ground-feeders relish cracked corn. All of the many species of sparrows that visit through the seasons snatch it up. Other ground feeders like the towhee, mourning dove, and junco also consume cracked corn. For woodpecker species, corn is a preferred seed. The large-billed birds such as cardinals and grosbeaks readily take corn products. The arboreal species accept corn's nutrition readily and this is why it is an important component of most suet products. And the list goes on...

One of the most frequently raised objections to the use of corn products in wild bird mixes is that the grain is attractive to squirrels and "black birds." Common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, and red-winged blackbirds will visit feeders when a yard's surrounding habitat includes meadows, fields, and wetlands. They typically use feeders heavily only before and after migration. Lacking the classic conical bill of a true seed-eating bird, they are most likely to compete at the feeder when a mix contains barley, wheat, rye, and oats. These soft-fleshed grains are easily consumed by the group. Cracked corn is hard, brittle and much more difficult for them. Being opportunists, they will come to almost any feeder to sample the contents for consumable food. But they are less likely to return to a feeder when a premium product is present. Squirrels will take ANY bird food product that they can access. Put two feeders in the same yard, one with corn as a component and one without corn, and the squirrels will consume BOTH every time.

With the exceptions of Ultimate Blend and Just Desserts®, cracked corn or crimped corn are utilized in Aspen Song® mixes. Its inclusion rate is a relatively modest percent of the whole formula, but it is a nutritionally important component. It is there for the birds! Birdfood manufacturers that would claim corn is a filler ingredient do not understand the nutritional requirements of the feeder birds. They believe by touting its absence they can call their products "high quality." This is only a marketing ploy. Let's let the birds decide!