Feeding Red Squirrels

Why Feed Red Squirrels?

Competition from grey squirrels, loss of habitat, disease and cat predation can all leave red squirrels hungry and unable to feed their families. The red squirrel population in Perth & Kinross is fragile and could disappear in as few as five years. Feeding them in your garden would give them a fighting chance for survival when times are hard. Plus, watching their antics when they drop by is great fun.

What Should I Feed Them?

In the wild, red squirrels love to eat nuts, seeds and berries. Serving up hazelnuts, sunflower seeds and unsalted peanuts in the garden will provide a welcome feast. Beechnuts, chestnuts, walnuts and pine nuts are also good if you can afford them.

Be careful not to offer too many peanuts. They can cause calcium deficiency and stop young squirrels growing healthy bones. All squirrels need calcium. You can help them find it by putting out a piece of bone, cuttlefish or even antler to gnaw on. Mixing bone meal with their food is also helpful.

Some squirrels will be very happy if you put out apples or carrots, which will also provide some calcium.

Don't forget to provide a bowl of water for your visitors to drink.

How Often Should I Feed Them?

Feeding red squirrels provides a supplement to their regular food gathering.
Providing small amounts every 3-4 days helps them to top up without becoming dependent on one place.

Throughout the year the best times for food in the wild are spring and autumn. Surprisingly, summer is the time when nature's larder is most empty and the squirrels need a helping hand. Feeding through the winter can offer an additional boost to help them reach the spring well-fed and healthy to bring up the next generation.

How Can I Feed Reds NOT Greys?

- If grey squirrels appear in your garden please contact us for advice.
- Red-only feeders are a good way of making sure that greys will not raid their food supply.
  Plans are available from the Project.
- It may be best to stop feeding for a time as there is a chance that greys may transmit the squirrelpox virus (deadly to reds) onto the feeder.
- Make sure that the feeder is regularly cleaned with a rodent-safe disinfectant such as Cascade or Johnson's Clean And Safe.

If you decide to feed red squirrels, think of keeping notes on how many visit your garden and when they come. Don't forget to let us know as your information will allow us to build a picture of where they live and to work to protect them.

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