

# Gardening Basics

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## Preventing Bird Damage To Fruits

We all love birds, but not so much when they eat our precious peaches! There are methods to control birds on fruit crops.

The primary birds that damage fruit crops are American robin, European starling, cedar waxwing, American crow, common grackle, house finch, and house sparrow. Except for pigeons, European starlings, and house sparrows, all birds are protected by state or federal laws. A federal migratory bird depredation permit is required if damage control techniques may harm protected birds. So, what are the bird control options?

### Exclusion

Covering fruit plants and trees with netting is the most effective method for controlling bird damage to fruit crops. Use ¼" to ½" plastic netting draped over a simple frame, such as PVC or Pex pipe. Avoid draping the netting directly on the plants where the birds can still access the fruit through the net. The netting should be long enough to drape to the ground and anchored with garden staples, stones, or boards to keep the birds from accessing the fruit from under the netting. Larger fruit can be covered with individual mesh sacks, although this can be time-consuming. Apply the net near the end of flowering before the fruit ripens. Although the upfront cost of netting may be high, it can be reused year after year.

### Biological Control

Commercial growers sometimes use birds of prey such as hawks, falcons, and kestrels to keep down the population of fruit-eating birds. Birds of prey are not a practical solution for the urban homeowner.

### Repellents

A chemical repellent with the active ingredient methyl anthranilate can be applied by fogging or spraying. Methyl anthranilate is a contact irritant that affects all bird species. It is a registered pesticide, so the user must carefully read the label instructions. Repeated applications are required to be effective.

### Harassment

A combination of noise and visual repellents may also be effective in frightening away birds. Noisemakers include cannons, exploders, and sirens. These sounds must be present on an irregular interval and moved around to be effective. Visual repellents include reflective ribbon, streamers, spinners, metal pie tins, owl and snake models, and scary-eyes balloons. These need to be moved around and are most effective if several types are used in combination with noisemakers.

### Shooting and Trapping

Neither shooting nor trapping is a practical or effective control method. Both are slow with inconsistent results; as noted before, these methods require a federal permit.

### Other Considerations

Birds are beneficial, too. They help keep damaging insect populations in check. Choosing the least disruptive control method applied at the right time will let you enjoy both the birds and your fruit harvest.

## Sources and Resources

"Protecting Berries From Birds," Clemson Cooperative Extension  
<https://hgic.clemson.edu/protecting-berries-from-birds/>

"Managing bird damage on fruit farms," Michigan State University Extension  
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/managing-bird-damage-on-fruit-farms>.

"Birds on Tree Fruits and Vines," University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources  
<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74152.html>