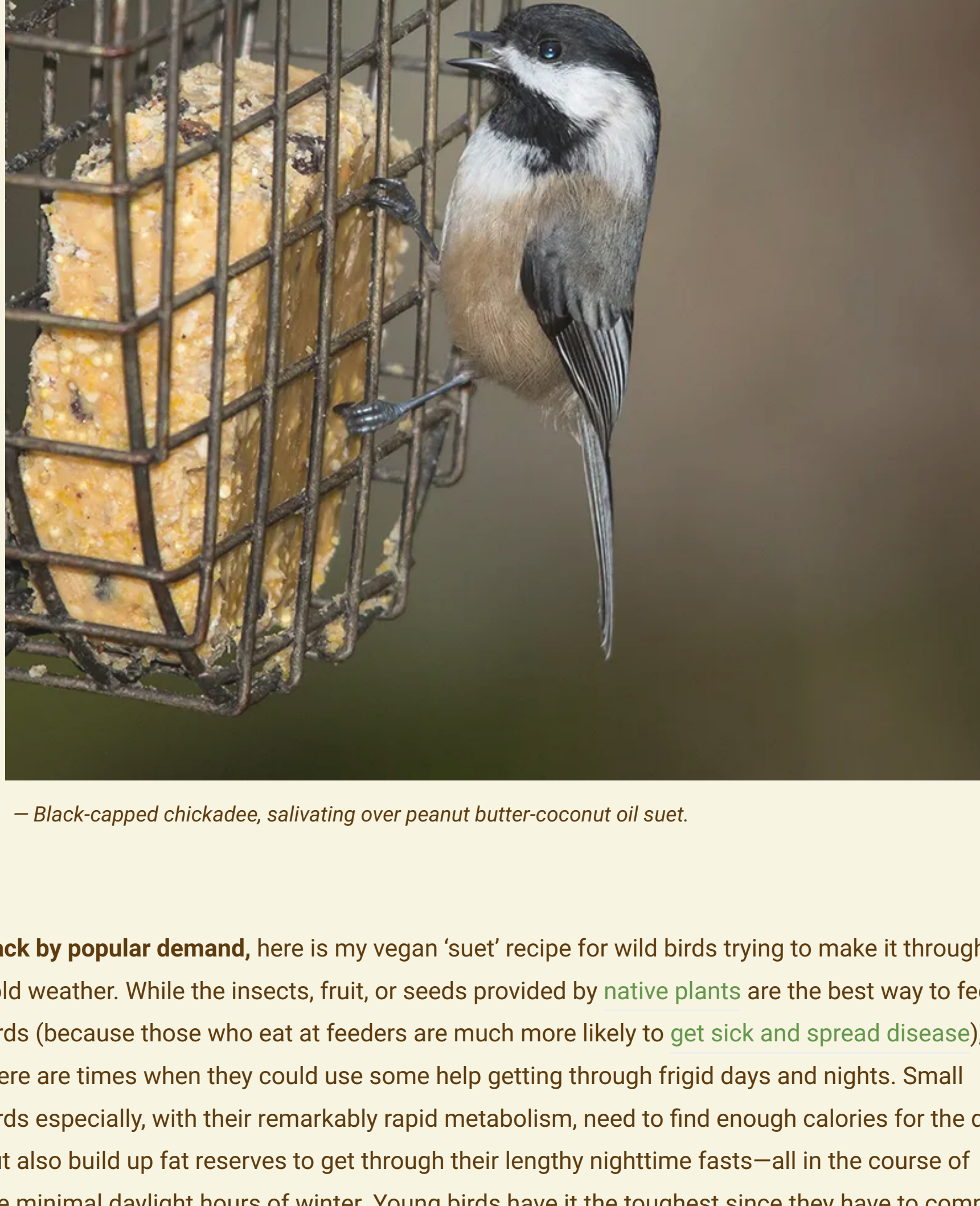


# REAL GARDENS GROW NATIVES

Design, Plant, & Enjoy a Healthy Northwest Garden

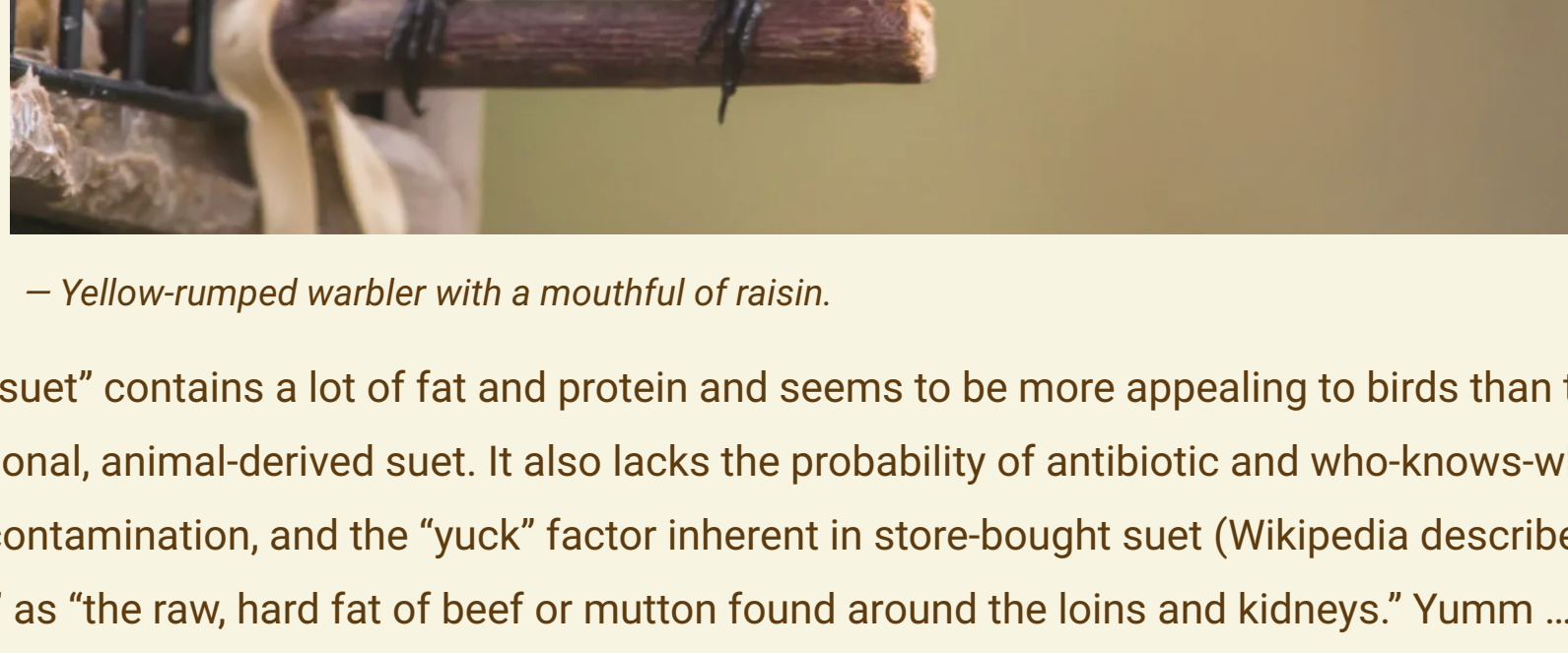
## A Winter Treat for Wild Birds: Plant-Based Suet

Posted on January 8, 2017 by eileen stark



— Black-capped chickadee, salivating over peanut butter-coconut oil suet.

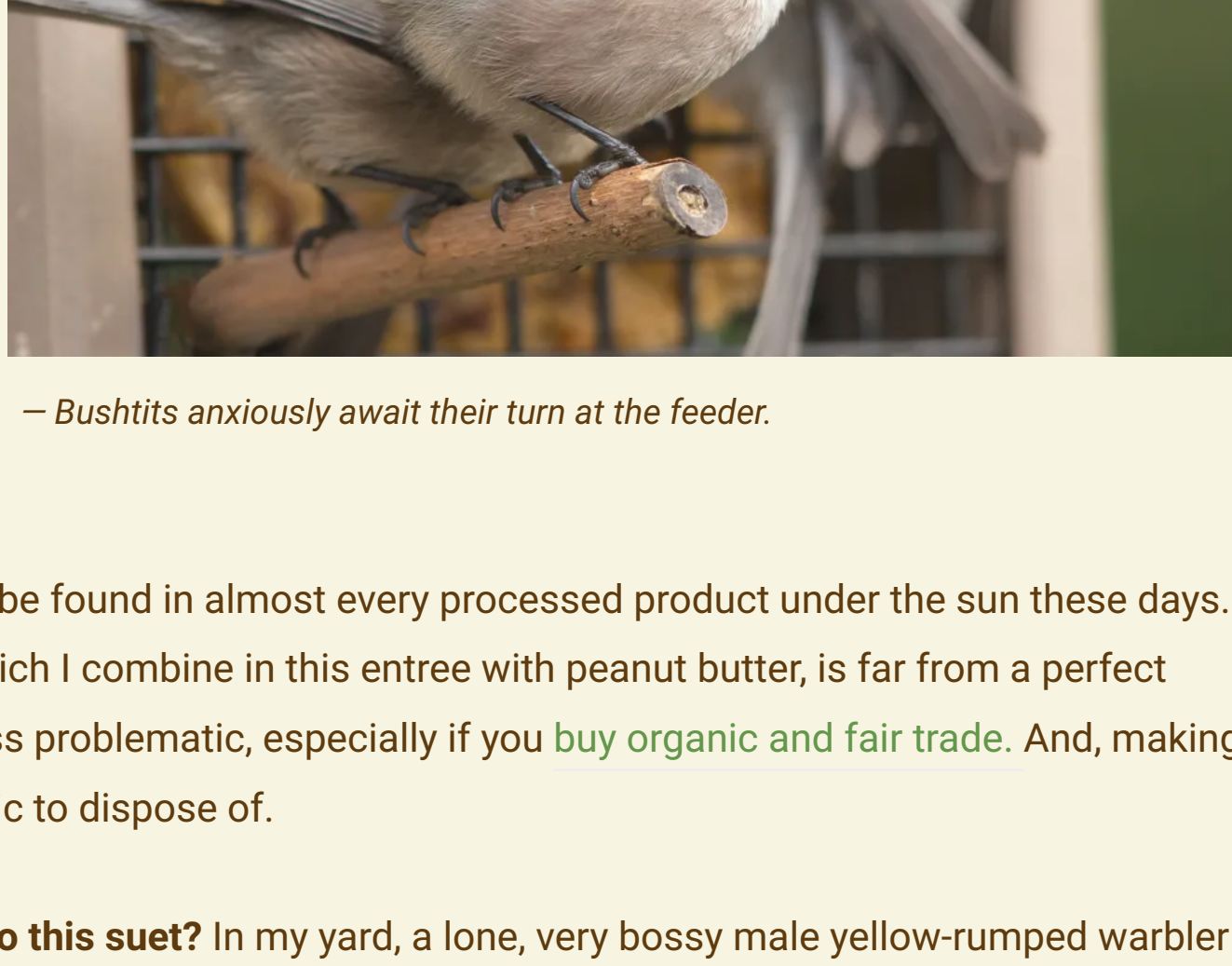
Back by popular demand, here is my vegan 'suet' recipe for wild birds trying to make it through cold weather. While the insects, fruit, or seeds provided by native plants are the best way to feed birds (because those who eat at feeders are much more likely to get sick and spread disease), there are times when they could use some help getting through frigid days and nights. Small birds especially, with their remarkably rapid metabolism, need to find enough calories for the day but also build up fat reserves to get through their lengthy nighttime fasts—all in the course of the minimal daylight hours of winter. Young birds have it the toughest since they have to compete with mature birds who have better access to food and roosting sites. Despite their amazing abilities to get through cold, stormy winters, some do die during especially stressful times.



— Yellow-rumped warbler with a mouthful of raisin.

This "suet" contains a lot of fat and protein and seems to be more appealing to birds than the traditional, animal-derived suet. It also lacks the probability of antibiotic and who-knows-what-else contamination, and the "yuck" factor inherent in store-bought suet (Wikipedia describes "suet" as "the raw, hard fat of beef or mutton found around the loins and kidneys." Yumm ... ). And, the fats in this recipe used in place of the dead animal lipo — especially the coconut oil — pack in the health benefits. I strongly recommend using organic ingredients whenever possible considering the deplorable loss of birds and other animals to pesticides and the harmful effects of synthetic fertilizers.

This recipe also helps you avoid participating in the sheer misery and environmental destruction associated with animal agriculture. Of course, other solid fats have their pitfalls. I passionately avoid palm oil—the cheap fat linked to climate change, tropical deforestation, habitat degradation, animal cruelty, and indigenous rights abuses—which seems to be found in almost every processed product under the sun these days. And while coconut oil, which I combine in this entree with peanut butter, is far from a perfect ingredient, it is slightly less problematic, especially if you buy organic and fair trade. And, making your own means no plastic to dispose of.



— Bushtits anxiously await their turn at the feeder.

Which birds might flock to this suet? In my yard, a lone, very bossy male yellow-rumped warbler named Rumpy (pictured above) makes a point to come back every winter for his suet, but northern flickers, downy woodpeckers, bushtits, black-capped chickadees, chestnut-backed chickadees, scrub and stellar's jays, juncos, Bewick's wrens, nuthatches, and song sparrows are common patrons as well (with Rumpy's permission, of course).



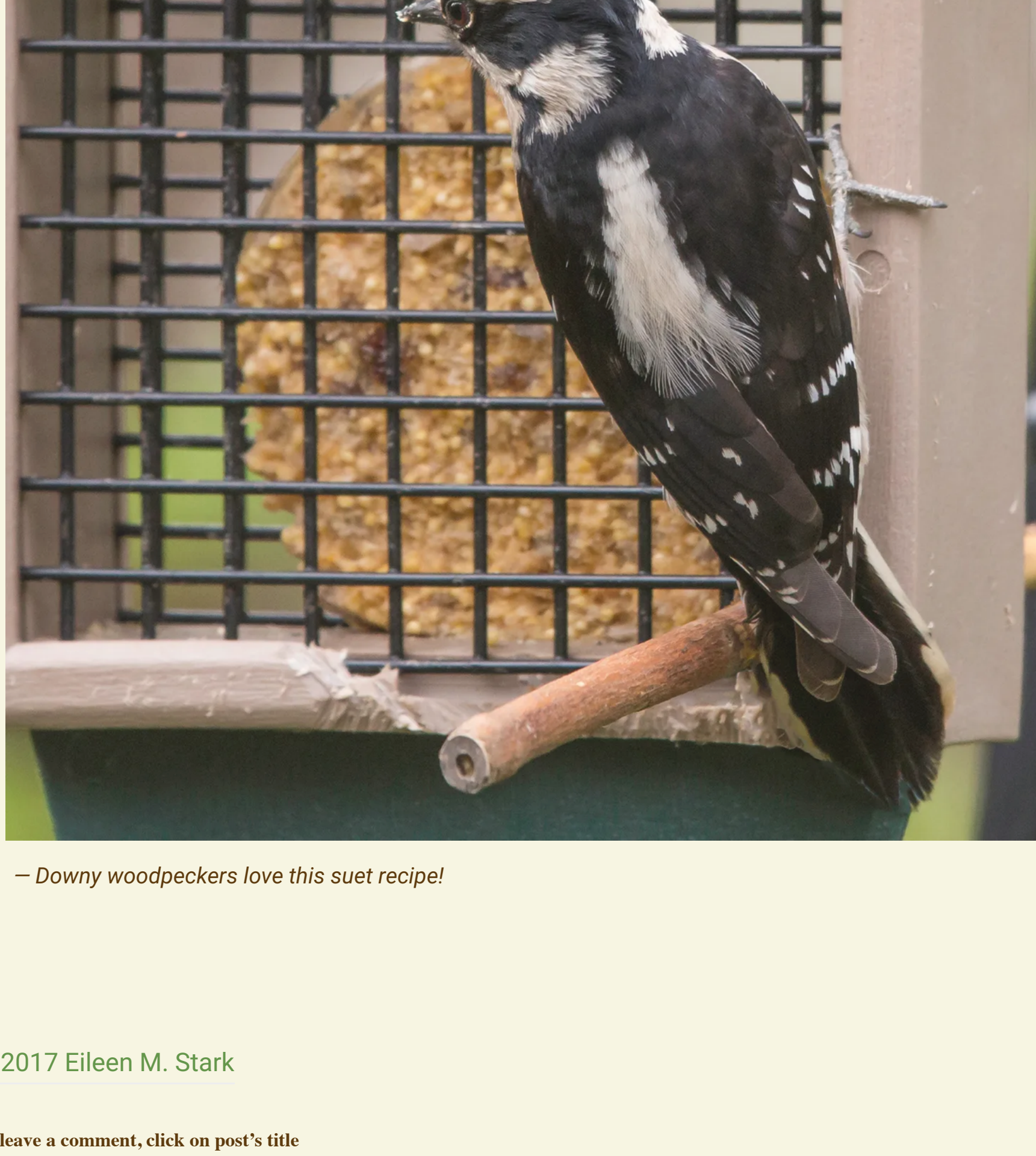
Here is the recipe for one small (roughly 6 ounce) "cake." Double the recipe for large feeders. Bonus points if you use organic ingredients!

- ¼ cup coconut oil, preferably unrefined
- ¼ cup unsalted peanut butter, preferably chunky
- ¼ cup + 1 to 2 tablespoons raw, unsalted sunflower seeds
- ½ cup + 1 to 2 tablespoons raw coarse corn meal (aka polenta)
- ½ cup + 1 to 2 tablespoons raw millet, hulled or not
- 1 to 2 tablespoons chopped raisins or other dried fruit, optional
- Additional chopped unsalted peanuts or nuts, optional

**Directions:** Gently warm coconut oil over very low heat (or in microwave under low power) just until it starts melting. Remove from heat and stir in peanut butter, then other ingredients. (Add more dry ingredients if it's runny.) Spoon the mixture into a mold (small storage containers work well) that will fit your feeder. Cover and freeze on a flat spot for at least an hour before popping it out of the container and placing in your feeder outside.

If it's very cold outside I store it in the refrigerator for a few hours so it's not impenetrably frozen when placed outdoors. Likewise, when nighttime lows are predicted to go below around 30°F I bring the feeder indoors at night and keep it in a cool spot (less than 60°F) and place it outside early the following morning.

- TIPS:**
- ◆ This suet is intended only for cold weather and will begin to soften at temperatures above 60° F or so. It will become a drippy mess if subjected to sunlight in such weather.
  - ◆ To prevent disease transmission, be sure to clean suet feeders with hot soapy water and rinse well before each refill. No bleach.
  - ◆ Rotate bird feeder positions to reduce the likelihood of birds eating poop-contaminated food on the ground, and if you have more than one feeder, space them apart to keep birds from getting unnaturally close.
  - ◆ To reduce the chance of window strikes, place all bird feeders either within 3 feet of your house or at least 25 feet away.
  - ◆ To keep squirrels and other rodents at bay, hang feeder on a pole with a squirrel baffle, placed at least 8 feet from any jumping place.
  - ◆ Suet feeders with tail props are nice for woodpeckers like flickers who normally feed with their long tails supported vertically.
  - ◆ Extra cakes may be stored in your freezer for several months or in your refrigerator for a week or two.



— Downy woodpeckers love this suet recipe!

© 2017 Eileen M. Stark

To leave a comment, click on post's title

Wildlife attract birds, peanut butter suet, suet for birds, suet recipe, vegan suet, wildlife garden

← After a Storm: Dead Wood Gives Life

Pacific Northwest Plant Profile: California hazelnut (Corylus cornuta var. californica) →

### 2 thoughts on "A Winter Treat for Wild Birds: Plant-Based Suet"

Krys October 10, 2020 · My birds keep hitting the picture window I. Can't move the feeders back someone told me to cut-strips of foil or ribbon to to hang on the windo so no reflection of the trees outside, they also hit my front window no feeders out there.

Reply ↓

eileen stark Post author October 10, 2020 ·

If you can't move the feeders at least 25 feet from your windows or right next to your windows, then don't feed at all. Native plants are a much safer way to provide for birds. See this post for all the info you need: <http://www.realgardensgrownatives.com/?p=1834>.

Reply ↓

### Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment \*

Text input field for comment

Name \*

Email \*

Website

Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

Notify me of new posts by email.

Post Comment button

### Follow Real Gardens' Blog

Get each new post delivered to your inbox.

Email Address input field

Subscribe button

Real Gardens Grow Natives ... 1,281 followers. Follow Page and Share buttons.

### Recent Posts

Stop the Poisons: Safe Alternatives to Rodenticides – January 7, 2024

Urgent: Serious Threat to Oregon's Tree Canopy, Wetlands and Environmental Zones – September 27, 2023

Study Confirms Neonic's Deadly Harm to Birds as EPA Ignores Facts – September 3, 2023

Pacific Northwest Native Plant Profile: Red huckleberry (Vaccinium parvifolium) – February 25, 2023

Can We Save Oregon Ash Trees? – July 24, 2022

### Upcoming events:

MON 05 FEB 2024 Corvallis Garden Club, Oregon 7:00 pm

WED 14 FEB 2024 Northwest Flower and Garden Show, Washington 2:45 pm

THU 14 MAR 2024 Portland State University Pollinator Seminar Series 4:00 pm