

Pet-Safe Bird-Friendly Yard Checklist

Birds need water, layered cover, and food — in that order. In a yard with a dog and a cat, each of those three has a placement rule attached. This checklist is the geometry, in order.

1. Pet-safe setup

- [] Dog's fence-line patrol lane mapped; dense shrub cover planted inboard of it.
- [] Thorny species kept off the dog's running lanes.
- [] Brush pile sited in a back corner, away from the dog run and away from the house foundation so it does not become rodent harborage against the wall.
- [] Cat plan decided: indoors or an enclosed catio is the only approach that reliably protects birds. Bells and breakaway collars are partial measures, not a fix.
- [] If a cat goes out, water and feeders kept clear of low dense cover, block walls, planters, and patio furniture that give it a hunting platform.
- [] Rodenticides removed from the property — they move into hawks and owls and can poison your own animals.
- [] Broad-spectrum insecticides, outdoor sticky traps, cocoa mulch, and dyed mulch near the bath all eliminated.
- [] Pool escape route checked: a textured ramp or shallow step area helps fledglings, ground birds, and a dog.
- [] Glass reflections broken up on the exterior of large panels and picture windows with screens, cords, or closely spaced decals — interior blinds do not solve it.

2. Water, cover, and feeders

- [] Seed catch tray installed under the feeder; ground swept weekly.
- [] Seed stored in a sealed metal or hard plastic container, off the ground.
- [] Feeder pulled for a stretch if rodent activity shows up — reduce the food source instead of poisoning.
- [] Feeding concentrated at one open, visible station rather than several hidden ones.

Element	Placement rule
Bird water	Basin under 2 in. deep with a rough surface or flat stones for grip. 10–15 ft from dense low cover, walls, and furniture; within 20 ft of an open perch.
Shared water	Dogs drink from anything at ground level — keep it untreated (no algaecide, no additives) and scrub and refill every 1–2 days.
Dripper / bubbler	Doubles usage. Keep the splash zone over gravel or planting, not over dog turf.
Cover layers	Ground cover, mid-height shrubs, tree canopy. Wolfberry, hackberry, desert hackberry, mesquite, palo verde, jojoba.
Feeder height	5–6 ft up, away from anything a cat or dog can launch from.
Feeder vs. glass	Within about 3 ft of glass, or more than 30 ft away. The in-between distance is where strikes do the most damage.

Water outperforms feeders in the low desert. Feeders are the last layer, not the first.

3. Seasonal tips

Season	Routine
Summer (Jun–Sep)	Scrub and refill water every 1–2 days minimum; check it twice daily in extreme heat. Pull or shade any feeder holding seed that molds.
Monsoon (Jul–Sep)	Re-check the brush pile and basin after every storm, and dump anything holding standing water so it cannot breed mosquitoes.
Fall (Oct–Nov)	Best planting window for cover and fruit species. Deep-clean feeders before winter residents arrive.
Winter (Dec–Feb)	Keep water liquid and clean; it still matters in mild winters. Delay heavy shrub pruning so cover stays intact.
Spring (Mar–May)	Nesting season — postpone shrub and tree pruning until nests are inactive, and keep cats in through fledging.

Seasonal timing is written for the Phoenix low desert. Higher-elevation Arizona yards run several weeks later in spring and earlier in fall.

4. Warning signs to act on

- [] Spilled seed piling up — sweep it; moldy seed can make a dog sick and it feeds roof rats and ground squirrels.
- [] Repeated window or glass-fence strikes — add exterior treatment and move the feeder closer than 3 ft or beyond 30 ft.
- [] Cat staking out a station — relocate the station to open ground with clear sight lines.
- [] Algae or debris in the basin — scrub with plain water and a brush, never an additive.

Before you plant. No plant list is a guarantee. Animals vary and quantity matters — confirm every species against the ASPCA toxic and non-toxic plant database before you buy, and call your veterinarian or a pet poison hotline if you think your animal ate something.

Full guide: aeoutdoorliving.com/gardening/guides/pet-safe-bird-friendly-yard-arizona · Quail and ground birds: aeoutdoorliving.com/gardening/guides/quail-and-ground-birds-arizona

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