

A Cheap Recirculating Bird Bath

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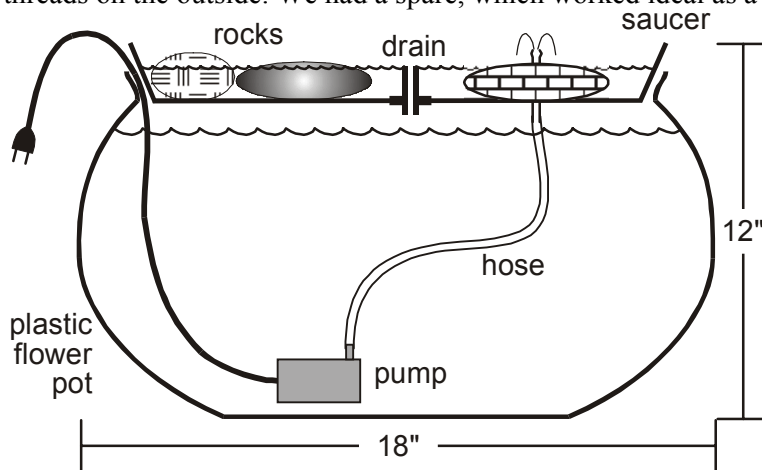
Last May, while watching a Hooded Warbler take a bath in the bird fountain at Tower Grove Park, we decided that somehow we were going to get something like that for our yard. We had recently put an all-purpose room on our house and the room has a wall of windows looking over the back yard. Unfortunately, our lot is small and there's only 13 feet from the windows to the fence. The good news is that there are shrubs along the fence line and over the years we've seen quite a few birds out there.

One Saturday last August, Betty was landscaping and planting the area outside the windows, trying to repair the inevitable damage caused by the construction and give us something nice to look at. Coincidentally, when I checked the mail, there was a pamphlet from our local BH&G realtor, who seems determined to list every house in the neighborhood. The pamphlet included instructions for how to build a recirculating birdbath from a flower pot. We looked it over, made a quick trip to the local nursery, and about 4 hours later we had a functional bird bath.

The BH&G pamphlet suggested using a large clay pot, plugging the hole with masonry cement, and waterproofing the inside. That seemed like too much trouble to us, so we bought a ~10 gallon plastic pot without a hole that *looks* like a decorative clay pot (\$30). (Besides, the plastic pot goes better with our new plastic siding.) The B&HG pamphlet suggested burying most of the pot in the ground, but we decided to set it on top near the fence because we knew that we'd have to clean it frequently. For the actual bowl of the bath, we found a clay-colored plastic saucer (\$8) intended for use under a flower pot that we instead put on top so that it nests in the opening of the pot.

The key component is a submersible pump. These are available in garden shops for making fountains. We didn't want a gushing fountain, so we bought a pump with the smallest flow rate we could find ("70 gallons/hour at 1 ft," \$30). Unlike the toasters and hair dryers, these pumps actually must be submersed in water before you plug them in.

All of the rest of the parts we had around the house, mostly in my collection of old plumbing parts. I drilled two holes in the saucer, one ($\frac{1}{2}$ "") through which to pump the water from the reservoir up into the saucer and the other ($\frac{3}{4}$ "") for a drain. I attached an 18-inch-long piece of flexible hose to the outlet port of the pump and pushed it through the hole in the saucer, bottom to top. Left over from a faucet repair project was a connector (the thing that goes between the shutoff valve and the faucet) that I used as the nozzle of the fountain. I drilled a hole through a piece of decorative limestone, stuck the connector through the hole, and attached the other end of the hose to the connector (a piece of copper tube would have worked as well). You know that thing in the back right corner of the kitchen sink where the rinse hose comes through the sink? It's basically a short black plastic tube with threads on the outside. We had a spare, which worked ideal as a drain tube. I screwed it part way into the second



hole on the saucer. In this way, the saucer filled to 1–1½ inches before draining back into the reservoir. We put a few more rocks in the saucer to act as perches. All that was left was to attach an extension cord and plug it into our outdoor electric outlet. We set the flow rate on the pump low so that the water only "shot" up about an inch.

It took several days before we got any customers. A catbird was the first bird I saw use it. During September I saw three species of migrant warbler take a drink, or at least stop to take a look. Since August, I've seen 18 species of bird use, or at least stop to gawk at, the

fountain. In December I decided to buy a birdbath heater (\$40), which I put in the pot, not the saucer. I am writing this on January 2, the day I had to cancel the Orchard Farm Christmas Bird Count on account of 8 inches of snow. More birds have been using the fountain today than any day so far, which is what prompted me to write this article. I watched a Flicker take no less than 20 sips of water and the goldfinches and juncos are constant customers.

Like any birdbath, it needs frequent cleaning. I looked hard in summer to see if mosquitoes were breeding in the reservoir, but never found any larvae, presumably because the water was circulating.