



Taking care of Rudolph and his friends

On Christmas Eve night, as Father Christmas is rushing from house to house to deliver presents to all the good girls and boys, his reindeer helpers often need a quick snack to keep them going on their busiest night of the year. What's great is you don't need to go and buy them special food (often the food you can buy in the shops is full of glitter, which is very bad for flying reindeer and other garden wildlife) – chances are you have just what they love in your store cupboards anyway!

Reindeer food mix:

- ★ A handful of wild bird seed (which may include sunflower hearts, naked rolled oats, dried mealworms, yellow millet, kibbled peanuts and black sunflower seeds) – this is what helps the reindeers fly!
- ★ A few rolled oats.
- ★ Some dried fruit, like cranberries (if you have a dog, please don't use grapes, raisins, sultanas or currants as these can be poisonous for them).
- ★ Some dried insects – Rudolph and his bird friends love mealworms and waxworms.
- ★ Some grated cheese.
- ★ A hint of chilli powder – it helps keep Rudolph's nose glowing red and will stop squirrels and rodents from stealing the food before Rudolph arrives!

Mix it all together, then sprinkle it on your lawn or leave it in a bowl by your front door just before you go to bed.

Reindeer cookie recipe

It's not just Father Christmas who likes cookies left out on Christmas Eve – Rudolph and his friends love them too! Try our quick and easy recipe for these special reindeer cookies. Don't worry if they're not all eaten up by Rudolph, the garden birds will really appreciate them!

Ingredients:

- ★ 250g lard or suet (vegetable shortening works just as well too).
- ★ 500g wild bird seed mix (which may include sunflower hearts, naked rolled oats, dried mealworms, yellow millet, kibbled peanuts and black sunflower seeds).

- ★ A handful of dried cranberries (optional).
- ★ You'll also need a saucepan, a spoon for mixing, a lined baking tray and some Christmas-shaped cookie cutters (plastic cutters work better for this).

Instructions:

Ask a grown-up to melt the lard or suet in a saucepan over a low heat, but not to let it boil

When melted, you can add in the wild bird seed mix (carefully, it's hot!) and stir it in, making sure it all sticks together well.

When mixed, leave to one side for 10 minutes so it starts to set.

Whilst still soft, spoon into the lined baking tray. Make sure it is evenly spread and at least 2cm deep throughout. Put the baking tray in the fridge to cool for about 30 minutes.

Remove from the fridge and lift the mixture out of the baking tray on the greaseproof paper. You should have a fairly solid slab.

Use your cookie cutters to cut out your reindeer cookies (if you have any leftover bits you could crumble them up and put them out for the garden birds to enjoy).

Leave them to cool, ideally in the fridge overnight.

Once set, they're ready to go outside for Rudolph! You can either leave them on a bird table, or perhaps hang them from a tree by tying some natural string around them.

Father Christmas's reindeer will be very grateful for these tasty treats you leave for them – as will their friends, the garden birds!

