



FRIENDS *of* PITTVILLE

Coin-operated dispenser for feed for wildfowl – hints and tips

1 Ask why you want to install and maintain a feed dispenser

Good for the wildfowl
Good for the environment (e.g. no waste, not polluting the water, no paper or plastic bags)
Working with another community group
Providing another thing for park visitors to enjoy
Earn a little income
Earn 'brownie' points for when making grant applications



2 What do you need?

2.1 A gumball machine – UK supplied

We suggest Toyvend <https://www.toyvend.co.uk/en-gb/categorie/machines> as the supplier because they were helpful when we had a problem, even though they could not solve it. Quote “The machine we recommend for outdoor use for animal food is the Brabo 5.1 or 8.2 vendors. Both machines can be seen on our website. If you register your details you will be able to see current prices”. ADDRESS: Sales Team, Toyvend Plc, Cottage Leap, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV21 3XP Phone 01788 577714; Fax 01788 540335



This image (left) is an example of a gumball machine. It is obviously not suitable for outdoor use without modification.

In our case, the local council made a strong metal casing (see next images below).



The person on the left is 5'5" tall so that gives you an idea of how big the dispenser is.

Note that the back is hinged and has a lock. The second image shows the gumball machine inside the metal casing with the back open.

Our machine came from the USA and was made to accept 20 pence coins. Do not buy from the USA as no parts are available in the UK – and no longer in the USA apparently, as the company (Northwestern Corporation) has gone out of business or, at least, is not making gumball machines any more.

It may have been cheaper to purchase initially but we have had to resort to eBay to buy parts.

2.2 Feed

We started with grain but have moved to manufactured pellets. You can see both in the image in the previous section. Grain is not a good choice (sinks quickly, not suitable for wildfowl). The pellets are a little more expensive (about £2 more per 20 kilo bag). We get them via a local animal feed supplier which may be cheaper than ordering direct. We use Fenland Waterfowl Pellets which are available from many suppliers. Here is just one.

<http://www.fancyfeedcompany.co.uk/products/fenlandwaterfowl.htm>

The feed is stored with the local charity which maintains the dispenser during the week.

There has been much discussion in the last couple of years about whether bread is okay for swans. No less an authority than HM The Queen's Swanmarker says it is alright to give them bread. To find out more copy and paste this URL into your browser

<http://www.theswansanctuary.org.uk/cause/official-statement-bread-queens-swan-marker/?fbclid=IwAR2jcwXswvckSoDXOtC2nibLL81ePkq62NphshqH88lmxcFbr92fpYOo5gI>

3 What did the dispenser cost?

The USA purchase of the gumball machine and the metal case (made by a local council employee) cost about £600. You may get it cheaper overall if bought in the UK and you are able to find an apprentice craftsman or woman. However, it is a complex job as the handle of the gumball machine has to be matched to a metal handle that turns it! Also, the seed has to come out from both machines and the pellets have to fall into a palm sized receptacle that the water can drain from!

4 Location

Install the machine near the edge of a lake or water, where it is visible to the public all year round. Make sure the ground is even and unlikely to get muddy. Ours is next to a litter bin (as it was considered visually better to keep the street furniture together in a grade2 listed park) but I would suggest not near a bin.



Our dispenser was initially painted black but the borough council gave permission for it to be painted by 16 year-olds on their National Citizen Service in 2017. It is much more visible now and use has increased as a result (see left).

5 Instructions for use

People do not read the fine print so don't have too many words. Our first notice (below) had too many words. Provide a contact number for reporting problems that will be answered on weekends as well. Say they should leave a message if no answer.

Make the amount to be paid VERY obvious. This will, unfortunately, not stop some people trying their luck with 2 pence coins or even foreign ones.

We had to resort to a rather 'in your face' notice after people repeatedly put in the wrong coins which jam the machine.



Another annoyance is that in very wet weather any feed left sitting in the chute becomes damp and will not slide through. That then prevents new dry feed from being dispensed and people ring to say the dispenser is not working. See next section!

6 Management

You MUST have one person who takes overall responsibility for the project. This person must be totally committed because it is a lot of work, especially if something goes wrong with the dispenser, the feed runs out on a weekend etc. That person must attend to any problem within 30 minutes (unless a message has been left in which case, ASAP). If the machine is left not working for very long people complain to each other and word gets around that it's a waste of time trying to use it.

7 Daily maintenance

A local charity for disabled adults maintains the dispenser every day during the week (ensures it is topped up, removes the money, dislodges stuck coins, and keeps the machine clean). Friends of Pittville maintains it on weekends, public holidays, Christmas and Easter. The profit is shared 5 days/2 days.

8 Running costs

This is hard to say because it depends how much the dispenser is used. The council provided feed for the first year. Since July 2016 we have spent about £350 on feed. A 20 kilo bag costs us about £12 from a local supplier.

9 Is it worth it financially?

Definitely! We covered our initial cost (£600) in the first year (but did not have to repay that as the local council paid for it, and for feed as noted above). In three years and seven months we have made over £4,000 before costs.

10 Publicity

We could do much more. The local press was interested when the project was first mooted and came to the 'unveiling'. Notices in noticeboards, on litter bins etc. would be worthwhile. Our trustees did not support the cost of fliers.

27 November 2018

www.friendsofpittville.org.uk
Registered charity 1146790

