

GERTRUDE THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

Do you wear bright summer clothes?



Photo: Audubon.org

The **American Goldfinch** undergoes a molt in the spring and autumn. It is the only finch to undergo a molt twice a year. During the winter **molt**, it sheds all its feathers and look rather drab. In the spring, it molts all but the wing and tail feathers, which are dark brown on Gertrude and black on the male. Gertrude becomes a beautiful dull-yellow-olive and her male companion becomes bright lemon yellow. They are then ready for summer.



Gertrude is different from other female birds. She prefers to build her nest in late in summer, which is timed to coincide with the peak abundance of thistle seed. Gertrude lines her nest with thistle-down (fluffy stuff).

Gertrude is a social bird, and will gather together with other goldfinches while feeding and migrating—just like we do when talking to one another.

Cool Fact: The American Goldfinch's beak is small, conical, and pink for most of the year, but turns bright orange with the spring molt in both sexes. The shape and size of the beak aid in the extraction of seeds from the seed heads of thistles, sunflowers, and other plants.

Molt: the process of replacing feathers with new ones.

