



Nest Boxes

Nest boxes are human-made structures (typically made of wood) that provide a space for cavity-nesting birds and other wildlife (i.e., flying squirrels) to lay their eggs or raise their young.

Provides: Shelter

Supports: Cavity-nesting birds like chickadees, nuthatches, wrens, bluebirds, tufted titmice and tree swallows. Other species that may use nest boxes include some squirrel species and other rodents like mice.



Flickr–Les Williams; background, Flickr–Roger H. Goun

Although birds and other cavity-nesting wildlife may prefer natural cavities over human-made nest boxes, a well-constructed and well-placed nest box can provide an excellent home. The design and placement of nest boxes is a species-specific endeavor. Height of the box, placement on the landscape, and size of the opening will vary based on the species you hope to attract.

Implementation Steps:

1 Building a nest box – Instructions for building nest boxes are readily available online, and we have listed some in the “Other Resources” section (see back page).

Here are a few construction tips:

- Use only natural, untreated wood (pine, cedar, or fir).
- Use galvanized screws instead of nails, which can loosen over time.
- A good nest box will have:
 - 1) walls that are thick enough to provide insulation ($\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick);
 - 2) a sloped roof with an overhang to channel rainwater away from the nest chamber; and

3) a recessed floor and drainage holes to keep the nest box interior dry and comfy.

- Do NOT include a perch! Perches do more to assist predators and non-native cavity nesters than they do to help native cavity-nesting wildlife.
- Rough up the interior walls of the nest box or cut in a series of shallow grooves to help young wildlife climb out of the box.
- Build-in a hinged door to make nest checking and maintenance easy. Secure this door with a latch or hinge to keep predators out.

2

Installation and Maintenance – You will want to place your nest box out before the breeding season. In the south this means



Flickr—Maureen Leong Key

(Implementation Steps continued)

placing boxes out by February, and in the north by mid-to-late March. The best location for your nest box depends on the species you are trying to attract. Wildlife identification guides and local biologists are good resources for understanding placement on the landscape that provides the best opportunities to attract cavity-nesters to your box. Maintenance is generally very low and mostly entails cleaning out remnants of old nesting material from the box prior to each nesting season and in between nesting attempts during the season.

Common Mistakes:

- **Disruptive viewing habits** – It is best to observe birds and other cavity-nesting wildlife coming and going to the nest box from afar to prevent nest disturbance and possible abandonment of the nest by the parents. Once you stop seeing regular activity at the nest box, you can take a peek inside and see if the box remains occupied. If not, you can clean out the box for the next nesting attempt.
- **Well-intentioned, but ill-designed houses** – Although nest boxes that suit a variety of species are commercially available, avoid buying the decorative bird houses. These homes are aesthetically heart-warming but are not designed with birds in mind.
- **Spraying chemicals nearby** – Avoid spraying chemicals (pesticides/herbicides) near your nest boxes. Many cavity-nesting birds are insectivores and need to feed insects to their young.

Other Resources:

- **NestWatch.org** – An excellent resource for homeowners looking to encourage breeding pairs of birds to nest on their property or to become part of a citizen science effort. Become a certified NestWatch monitor and collect valuable nesting success data for ornithologists!
 - *Right Bird, Right House*
nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/right-bird-right-house
 - *Features of a Good Birdhouse*
nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/features-of-a-good-birdhouse
- *Shelves, Houses, and Feeders for Birds and Mammals* – A University of Wisconsin–Extension publication providing guidelines and designs on a wide variety of nest boxes and bird feeders.
learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/NCR338.pdf



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