



Bringing Wildlife Home

Nesting Boxes

Many species of birds require a natural cavity in a tree or branch where they can build their nest, lay eggs, and raise their young. Nesting boxes (or birdhouses) replicate these shelters for birds and create a safe and easy place for birds to live.



Nesting boxes come in many shapes and sizes to accommodate different varieties of birds.

Here are some helpful tips to guide you through the process of buying or building, installing, and maintaining your own nesting box. You can purchase nesting boxes at home improvement or birding specialty stores, through catalogs or via the internet.

- Install your birdhouse before the nesting season begins. Mid to late winter (late February) is best for most geographic areas.
- Each species of bird has different nesting box requirements. Visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Birdhouse Network at birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/bhbasics/refrchart.html to get nest box plans for a variety of species.
- Boxes built of untreated wood are best.
- Your box should not have a perch. Perches are unnecessary and allow invaders such as house sparrows access to the box. House sparrows are known to sit on a nesting box perch and peck at other birds using the nesting box.
- You can score the inside walls of the box with a knife or nail, which will help baby birds in reaching the exit hole when they are ready to leave the nest.
- The box should have drainage holes in the bottom, ventilation holes toward the top (but not in the roof, or water will leak in), and a hinged side to allow easy access for cleaning and monitoring the birdhouse.

Nesting boxes or birdhouses replicate natural bird shelters such as cavities in trees or branches.



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- Hang your box from a pole with a predator guard. Nailing boxes in trees allows predators easier access and can harm the tree. There are different kinds of predator guards designed for different predators. For more information, visit www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/resources/construct.
- Don't use insecticides and other pesticides on the nesting box. Birds rely on insects to feed their young and chemicals are harmful to the birds.
- You should monitor the nesting box on a regular basis. During the nesting season, beginning in March, examine the box every two weeks to see if it is being used. You can remove any nests that are no longer being used and check for any nuisance species. Clean the nesting box in September or October. The box should remain clean until the following spring.
- If you find a naked or down-covered baby bird without feathers it should be returned to the nest. Birds have a poor sense of smell and the parents will not reject the baby if you touch it.
- A baby bird with fully formed feathers that is out of the nest is called a fledgling and should be left alone. Fledglings often hop out of the nest before they've mastered flying and spend a few days on the ground while their parents continue to feed them.
- Keep your cat indoors. Domestic cats kill millions of birds every year.
- Try to identify invasive exotic birds, which may out-compete and even kill native birds. Remove their nests from your nesting box if you discover them. For more about undesirable birds visit www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/attracting/feeding/pests_birds.
- Participate in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch, a citizen science project gathering information about all of North America's nesting birds. For more information visit watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest/.



Visit www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife for more information.

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